OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CL[…]S

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BEST OF BRITISH
A FOND LOOK BACK AT THE OLD HOME COMPUTERS THAT MANY OF US FORGOT

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!
EPYX
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE HIT 8-BIT SPORTS CREATORS



LET'S FIGHT!
BEAT-'EM-UP SPECIAL
A BONE-CRUNCHING GUIDE TO THE BEST EVER FIGHTERS

THE MAKING OF...
SKWEEK
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE CLASSIC FRENCH PUZZLER

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PASTFINDER
"I WANTED TO CALL THE GAME SHADOW WALKER BUT IT GOT OVERRULED" - DAVID LUBAR

MARS MATRIX
A SHOOT-'EM-UP WITH FAR TOO MANY BULLETS

BACK TO THE 80s

BRAND NEW MEGA DRIVE RPG PIER SOLAR REVEALED

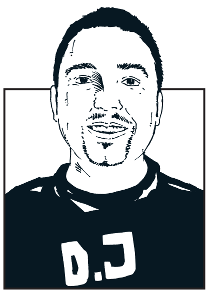
THE COMPLETE HISTORY: MIGHT AND MAGIC

MEGA MAN 2

THE MAKING OF... THE WIZARD

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE FIGHTING GAME



DARRAN JONES

Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike. It's a staggering achievement that features an amazing roster of balanced fighters and the awesomeness that is the parry system.
Expertise: Convincing my wife that buying 80 HD DVDs was actually a good idea
Currently playing:
Triggerheart Exelica
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



MARTYN CARROLL

Double Dragon, in the arcade, teaming up with a mate to stick elbows in the faces of those girlfriend-grabbing ne'er-do-wells.
Expertise: Missing deadlines
Currently playing:
Devil May Cry 4
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



STUART HUNT

Karate on the Atari 2600 – I'd love to give you some kind of reasoning, but there really are no words in the English language that can describe just how brilliantly entertaining this game is.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Sega Rally
Favourite game of all time:
Sega Rally



MIKE TOOLEY

Naughty Dog's *Way Of The Warrior* (3DO), I know its not in the 25, it doesn't deserve to be. A soundtrack by White Zombie pounds as you play a game more akin to a slasher movie, the characters are insane and parodies of every Nineties stereotype. Take five and look it up.
Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing:
Triggerheart Exelica
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!



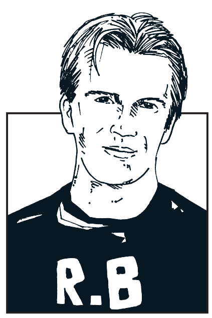
PAUL DRURY

Way Of The Exploding Fist on the C64. That sickening crunch when you land a flying kick to the back of the head still makes me wince. Top stuff.
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Block Block
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES

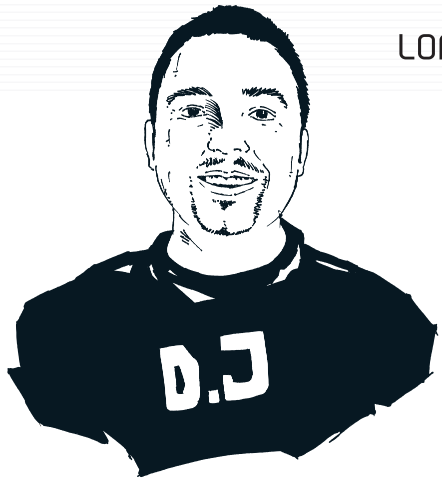
I'm going to get vilified for this but I always have fond memories of *Double Dragon* on the CPC. Yes, I know… Right! Outside. Now!
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Summer Games
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



RICHARD BURTON

Splatterhouse 3 (Mega Drive): A B-movie-esque horror beat-'em-up with gore galore and the nice touch of having multiple endings according to your speed of arse-kicking – all with added snot and goo. And those creepy severed hands…
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming
Currently playing:
Gunstar Heroes
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...



Creating a retro magazine isn't easy. Sure, we get to play *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* every lunchtime (Stuart's the current champ), and yes, we occasionally converse with some of our childhood heroes, but it takes a lot of hard work each month.

Still, the end feeling you get from physically creating something that your readership genuinely enjoys is one of the best in the world – I rate it somewhere between the birth of my first-born and completing *Strider* on one credit – and I wouldn't change it for the world.

The last few issues of **Retro Gamer** have seen a positive surge on our forums (www.retrogamer.net/forum), with quite a few new members signing up and telling us their likes and dislikes about the magazine. Granted, we always love the positive stuff, but we're never afraid to listen and act upon something you don't like. And this is where you come in.

If you haven't done so already, visit the above URL and say hi. There's a friendly bunch of readers there who are just as passionate about old games as you are and it's the easiest way of getting in contact with Stuart and myself.

We're going to be 50 issues old next month and it's readers like you that have allowed us to get there. So come along and say hello. We'd love to hear from you.



Enjoy the magazine



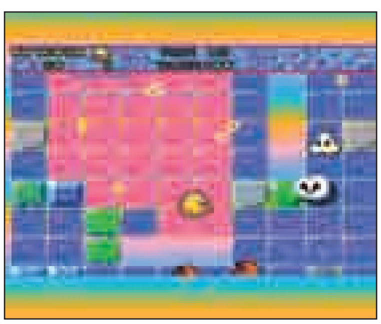


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TOP 25 BEAT-'EM-UPS









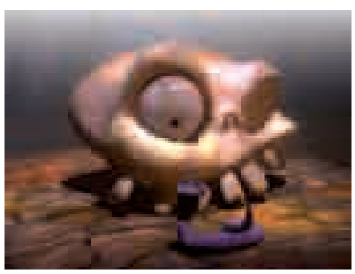
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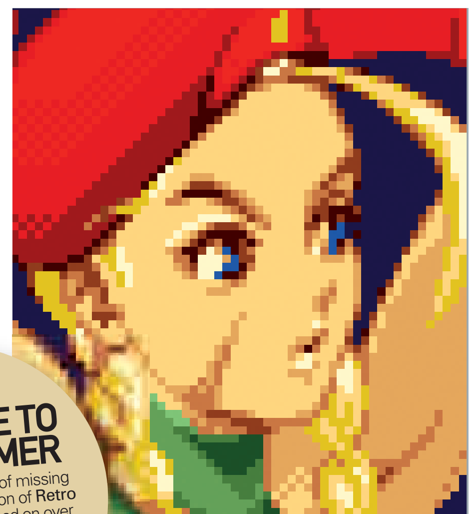


RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it





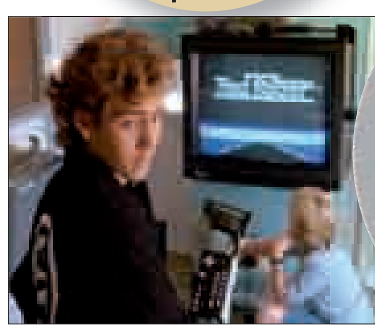
COMPANY PROFILE

EPYX



THE MAKING OF...

PASTFINDER



THE MAKING OF...

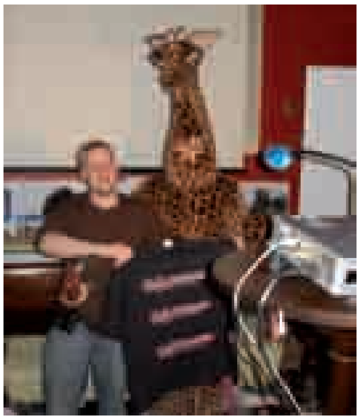
THE WIZARD

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…

RETROVISION BRINGS IT ALL BACK HOME

PAUL DRURY TAKES A TRIP TO THE LATEST LLAMASOFT MEET-UP





Tickets for the 2009 event go on sale in June from the website. Be warned, they sell out fast folks…

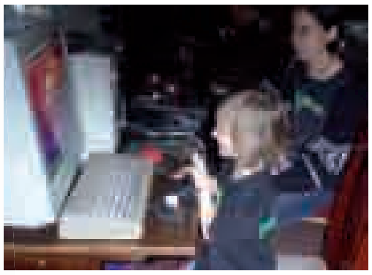
The tenth gathering of Llamasoft lovers, running from 8-10 February, saw the happy herd returning to Oxford's Folly Bridge Inn, the site of early iterations of this unique weekend of gaming, beer and curry. "It feels like coming home," grinned RetroVision organiser and Ming lookalike Mark Rayson, while supping another Guinness.

Super groups formed spontaneously for *Rock Band* sessions on the big screen, only to split acrimoniously over 'musical differences' shortly afterwards. A man in a giraffe suit caused much rubber-necking as he blasted through *Space Giraffe*. With a Vectrex as first prize, Saturday night's raffle had punters clutching crumpled tickets expectantly. Game competitions added an edge to proceedings, particularly the hard-fought battle for the high score on *Warpforce Chinchilla*, a nifty scrolling shooter coded specially for the show by Pete 'WiredWorm' West. And you'll be reassured to hear that **Retro Gamer** can hold its head high after picking up the gong for top score on *Matrix* for the C64. Emotional scenes followed.

Sadly, Jeff Minter, usually a regular attendee, had to stay home to tend to his flock (his sheep Ewenity was about to drop its lamb load), but Steinar Lund, the man responsible for many of Llamasoft's iconic game covers, turned up and even offered to do some artwork for future RV events.

"He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met," enthused Rayson, before going on to explain next year's event will climax with the debut gig of 6502 Reloaded. "It's me, Ben Daglish, Jon Hare, Jeremy Longley and Mark 'Mad Fiddler' Knight playing SID music evolved, plus Ben's planning to do a medley of Eighties TV tunes under the banner of Mrs Slocombe's Pussy…"

Visit www.retrovision.org.uk to book tickets, yak on the forums or make any set list requests…



Even the kids are down with *Warpforce Chinchilla*.



Steinar Lund with RetroVision head honcho Mark Rayson.

HERO OF THE MONTH



JIMMY CONNORS

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Jimmy Connors

First appearance: *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour*

Distinguishing features: Yellow balls

Weapon of choice: Tennis racquet

Most likely to: Give you a swift backhand

Least likely to: Become a professional bear wrestler

Interesting fact: He probably could have become a professional bear wrestler

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 31: HOW TO BE A COMPLETE BASTARD

Become the soul of the party – if the soul meant being a rude, bleach-swilling, methane-filled wino. The cutting satire of this Virgin classic is depicted brilliantly in its screenshot, with the aforementioned dishevelled alcoholic forming the letter 'T' in the word bastard. Genius.



JUST IN CAPCOM HAS ANNOUNCED ANOTHER NEW CHARACTER FOR STREET FIGHTER IV. DON'T WORRY WE'LL HAVE YET MORE NEWS ABOUT THE GAME NEXT MONTH. IT WOULDN'T BE RIGHT OTHERWISE

NEW STREET FIGHTER IV CHARACTERS ANNOUNCED

SERIOUSLY, HOW MANY TIMES CAN WE BEAT A NEWS STORY OUT OF THIS?

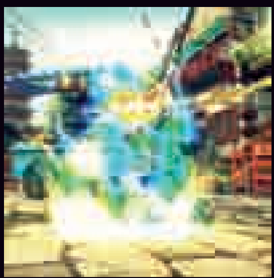
As *Street Fighter IV* rolls into development, a new batch of warriors have been announced. The good (actually, the great) news is that every character from *Street Fighter II* (well, barring the bosses, but even that's not been confirmed yet) will be appearing in the new game. So, that's Dhalsim, E Honda, Guile, Zangief and Chun-Li added to the original list.

There's also been a brand new female fighter announced, who, if we're completely honest, looks slightly out of place when stood next to the rest of the characters. Don't panic, she's not a hideous freak, it's just her look and style feels more, erm, how can we put this… SNK-like.

If you cast your eyes below you'll see a sneak peek at some of the new character models. As information about them is relatively non-existent at the moment, and, as we're so kind to you, we've also taken it upon ourselves to give you a pointless bit of observational filler underneath each character. Seriously though, this game is going to be the biggest videogame event of 2008, no doubt about it. We'll keep feeding you with more news as and when it comes.



DHALSIM
Yoga Flame, Yoga Fire, pointless levitating move, they're all there. Dhalsim, everyone's favourite elasticised Indian is back, and, as you can clearly see from the shot above, he retains his incredibly long-reaching punch.



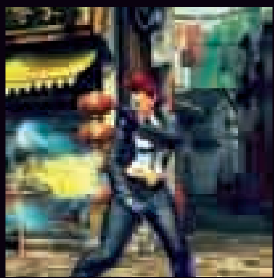
BLANKA
We're actually surprised that Blanka hasn't made it past *Street Fighter II* before now. He was one of the more well-loved characters in *Street Fighter II*, even if he was one half mummy's boy, the other a yellow gorilla.



CHUN-LI
Is it us or is Chun-Li slowly turning into a dude? Here we can clearly see her massive hands – which resemble a boxer's face with five cigars in its mouth – and over-zealous thigh muscles that put Zangief's to shame.



ZANGIEF
Looking like a cross between Brian Blessed and a *He-Man* action figure, Zangief is the most visually refined character we've seen so far. Look at those biceps; you wouldn't want those taking you on a spinning pile-driver, would you?



CRIMSON VIPER
As you can see, Capcom's most recent female addition to the *Street Fighter* franchise has an air of SNK about her. Well that, and a bit of Cathy Dennis. She's rather sexy, and far less manly than Chun-Li, which is a good thing.

DUKE NUKES 'EM LIVE

CLASSIC FPS TO MAKE AN ONLINE APPEARANCE

It's recently been announced that the original *Duke Nukem*, 3D Realms' seminal PC franchise, *will* be kickin' ass and chewin' gum over the Xbox Live Arcade. (Typical, these *Duke Nukem* games are like buses, you wait years for one to come along and then two turn up at once).



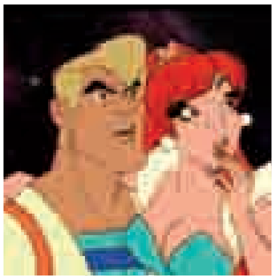
Now, obviously the 360 isn't in dire need of an FPS at the moment, (the console's practically a collector of the bloody things) but when it's a classic retro game involved, you know us, we're sold from the off.



Scott Miller, the head honcho at 3D Realms, confirmed that a downloadable version of *Duke Nukem* will be coming to Xbox Live and will offer online multiplayer support, score boards and even a co-op mode, which had us all very excited indeed. In typical *Nukem* style, talks about getting Duke a Marketplace green card originally began way back in August last year… and only now are we starting to hear word that his application has been granted. It could be worse – we're still waiting for *Forever* to show its face.



LAST-MINUTE NEWS



It all went down hill for the Genie after Aladdin.

SMOKING ACES

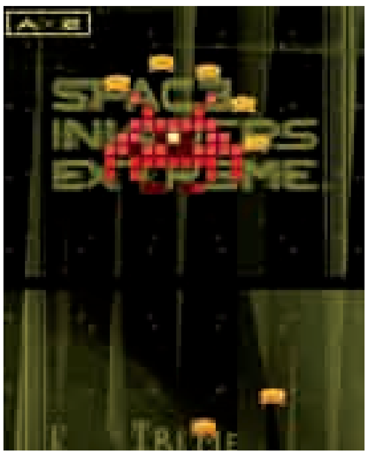
SPACE ACE GOES HIGH DEFINITION

Those rich enough to own a HD DVD player or a PS3, will soon be able to play Don Bluth's animated Laserdisc classic *Space Ace*, in glorious 1080p. Going for a princely sum of $49.95 in the States, (so it'll probably go for around £25 quid when it reaches this side of the pond) this high-definition update restores the original film footage and remasters the soundtrack. Sounds like it should be a real treat for fans of the original game then. *Space Ace* is being released in America in August, so, given the rate they're churning these things out at the moment, expect the disc to hit British retailers not too long after.

SPACE INVADERS EVOLVED

A CLASSIC SHOOT-'EM-UP SOME 30 YEARS IN THE MAKING

We were *extremely* excited when we heard that *Space Invaders* is getting yet another re-imagining. (Honestly, Taito, you would certainly notice the sarcasm in our voices if we were having a conversation about this in person.)



Mark our words, this is going to be one to watch this year.

Okay, if the truth be known, we weren't really that excited to hear the news… well, that was until we caught sight of a few screenshots and a few pieces of information about the game, then boy did we change our tune.

Space Invaders Extreme sounds ace (and yes, in case you're wondering, that would be *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour* ace). It takes *Space Invaders* and blends it with the rhythmic-blasting-action of *Rez* to create an innovative overhaul of the classic space shmup.

Also, to incorporate a really neat arcade sensation into the game, the tiny paddle that's designed for play with *Arkanoid DS* (which, incidentally, we're still waiting for, Taito) will be compatible with the game. *Space Invaders Extreme* was scheduled for release on 21 February in Japan, however, it isn't currently scheduled for a UK release, so you might have to consult your local importer for a copy.



VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



BUBSY THE BOBCAT

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH

Without bad villains there would be no good heroes. What would Batman be without the Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Complete rubbish, that's what. This month: Bubsy the Bobcat

First appearance: *Claws Encounters Of The Furred Kind*

Distinguishing features: A white T-shirt with a red exclamation mark

Weapon of choice: Bouncing

Most Likely to: Appear in a crap 3D sequel on the PlayStation

Least likely to: Drop the tiring double entendres

Unusual fact: Bubsy was one of the first characters to have differing animated deaths

THE TYPING OF THE DEAD… AGAIN!

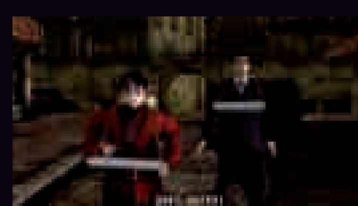
DON'T PANIC SEGA, WE HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN ABOUT YOU

We're big fans of Sega's peculiar new secretarial brain-training game. While on paper, the concept of killing zombies by tapping prose such as 'AM3' and 'I'll take him for eight dollars' sounds like someone at Sega was trying to bring the videogame giant down from the inside, it actually serves as a whole lot of fun that every Sega, *House Of The Dead* and typing fan would do well to experience.

Well, it appears, in an ironic fashion, that the *House Of The Dead* series isn't actually dead. Nope, it's risen from the flames for a Japanese-only sequel for the DS, called *English Of The Dead*. Thankfully, the premise is as wack as the original – a tool to help teach Japanese kids to speak proper English. Yes, there's a funny irony to be found in watching a zombie teaching kids how to speak the Queen's English, given that all zombies can say is 'brains' (and most of them can't aren't even able to do that properly – they hold the a for too long so it sounds like Braaaaaaaaaains).

Anyway, we're happy that Sega is choosing to return to *HOTD*, albeit not in the way we would have hoped. We surely hope it gets some kind of translation over here – it shouldn't be difficult though should it, just swapping a few words around?





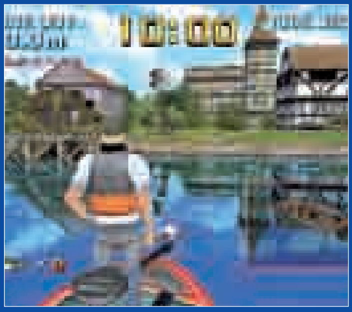
Dude, take off those shades, surely it's only going to make typing slightly more difficult.

Retro Gamer DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…

EVENT HOSTING
RETRO GAMER
IF YOU WANT **RETRO GAMER** TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



MARCH

SEGA BASS FISHING

Released: May

Publisher: Sega

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

While there's little doubt that a fishing game will work perfectly on the Wii, we can't help wondering why Sega is bothering with a bass game. We all know that the bass is the dreariest of fish – not as smart as a perch and lacking the killer instinct of a pike. Worst of all, they became really arrogant after the original arcade game was such a hit, and are already making ridiculous demands.



MAY

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

Released: May

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

Yes, it's frustrating that this keeps getting pushed back, but it's hard to complain when the end result could be the most comprehensive battler ever. The latest news from Japan and the States is that the game is bloody amazing. Sadly we don't have access to a Japanese or American Wii, so you'll have to wait a few month for the definitive review.



MAY

HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 & 3 RETURN

Released: May

Publisher: Sega

Price: £39.99

Format: Wii

A brilliant resurgence of the *HOTD* franchise will see a return to Sega's perennial arcade gun shooter on the Wii and word, this issue, of a peculiar follow-up to *Typing Of The Dead* that helps teach Japanese kids to speak English. We're hopeful that Sega will deliver something special for the game when it hits the shelves.



JUNE

SONIC CHRONICLES

Released: June

Publisher: Sega

Price: TBC

Format: DS

The teaming up of Sega and BioWare to bring a new Sonic RPG to the DS has all the elements to be something very special. Although we don't have a lot of info at the moment, there are a few screenshots floating around the internet. It looks like battles will be turn-based *Final Fantasy* affairs and the visual look will be a beautiful mix of Hayao Miyazaki-style artistry and *Sonic Rivals*-style pixels.



JUNE

LEGO INDIANA JONES

Released: June

Publisher: LucasArts

Price: £49.99

Format: Xbox 360, PS3, DS, Wii, PS2

Traveller's Tales is at it again, raiding LucasArts' back catalogue and a box of Danish building blocks to rebuild the three original *Indy* tales in Lego. And we can't wait. *Lego Star Wars* was a lot of fun and there's no reason that the developer can't produce the same magic again. We're a tad concerned about the direction they'll be going for '*Lego Labyrinth*', '*Lego Willow*' and '*Lego American Graffiti*' though?



JUNE

NEW INTERNATIONAL TRACK & FIELD

Released: June

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

It's back in the diary, yes, and it would appear that *New International Track & Field* is going all *Super Smash Bros.* on us, adding more characters and pushing back its release date until highly volatile tempers explode. To be honest, we're not too bothered that we have to wait a little longer to get our hands on the game, as we're sure Sumo Digital will knock this one out the park fittingly.



JULY

SOUL CALIBUR IV

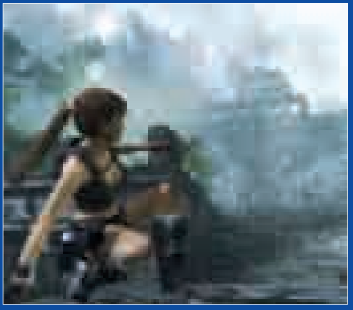
Released: July

Publisher: Namco

Price: TBC

Format: Xbox 360, PS3

Namco's popular swashbuckling franchise is soon to be making its way to next-gen consoles. The early word, so far, has been pretty positive and is something to the tune of new characters, including the Jedi Master Yoda for the Xbox 360 and the Sith Lord Vadar for the PS3, plenty of play modes and an online battle feature – which is only making us all the more eager for this game's summer release.



OCTOBER

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

Released: October

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £49.99

Format: Xbox 360, PS3

You can't really blame Eidos for releasing a third title in as many years. Following on directly from *Legend*, Lara once again finds herself up to her pretty neck in bad guys and ancient artefacts. Expect puzzles, a better aiming system, and a clever new engine that keeps track of incidental things like tracks in mud and dead bodies so you can find your way around more easily.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER

WHAT THE…

Dear Retro Gamer,
I was thinking that in about 40 years' time we could be down to the last original retro gamer. He's now in his eighties but can still manage a decent high score on *Galaxian* on his trusty Atari 2600. "They don't make them like they used to," he would mutter as he got another triple kill. He would hold younger players in awe as he recounted how he'd escaped the caverns in *Pitfall!* Getting overexcited would send his teeth flying across the room. He would walk down the high street, Activision patches proudly displayed all over his jacket, head held high.

Then one day he would pass away, the gaming world would be in shock, a Mario lookalike would lower the Buckingham Palace flag to half mast after forgetting himself for a moment and first raising it.

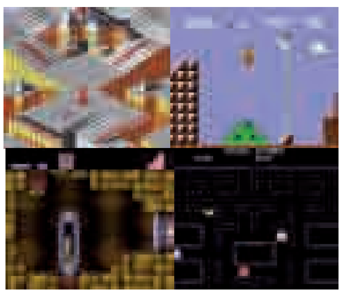
His dying wish would be to get to his funeral in the style of *Marble Madness*. Once there, Retroman's coffin, a Samus life-support unit, would be lowered into the Westminster Abbey vault, the choir in the background doing a *Pac-Man* death sound.

His headstone would read:
I've found and played the games of old,
Been through stress and strife,
But holy Metroids!
I didn't realise,
I only had one life.

Do you think we could actually get down to the last retro gamer?

Gregor Houghton, via email

Thanks for the letter, Gregor. We've often wondered whether we will still be playing videogames when we're older. However, we've never looked at it in the same frightening depth as you do. Still, despite the bleak future you have so vividly painted, you've certainly had us talking in the office, so for that very reason you've earned yourself a new binder and T-shirt. We hope you're still wearing it (the T-shirt) when you're 80.



We've often wondered what goes on inside the heads of our readers. Now we wish we hadn't asked

SOMETHING'S (NOT) BREWING

Dear Retro Gamer,
What's happening to your homebrew section? Promises were made several issues ago and so far nothing has materialised. Where are the extra pages of reviews? Where are the articles and emulation guides? Where is the in-depth homebrew news covering new games and updates?

I can appreciate that homebrew might not be seen as a big deal for many of your readers, but it's a thriving community that should be given far more coverage than you're currently offering. Please make sure this is rectified in future issues, as it's really starting to get annoying.

Timothy Brooks, Edinburgh

You're right, Timothy, we have been remiss on the homebrew scene lately. Something we're currently looking into is a community section that will cover everything from homebrew reviews to the Collector's Corner and Letters. We're well aware that there's a dedicated homebrew community out there and will do our best to ensure that it gets more coverage in the future.



EVERY MONTH, ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

RIDDLE ME THIS…

Dear Retro Gamer,
When I read in a recent edition of **Retro Gamer** the suggestion that the coming year might see articles about Dreamcast, I was a bit concerned. It raises an age-old argument over what constitutes 'retro' in gaming terms. Since the answer is deeply subjective, I offer two solutions:
a) Regard everything not currently in production or not the latest generation as retro, b) Establish a past date relative to the current date after which no games should be discussed (the period need not be rigid).

Both approaches satisfy the criteria of retro, but since time in technological terms is disproportionate to time in human terms, things get tricky.

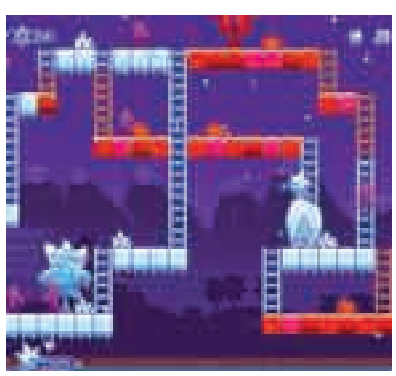
The first idea is simple and easy to follow, but I feel a game that is only a generation old is not mature enough, has not passed in the human psyche or the legends of childhood to qualify emotionally. It will look simply dated, yesterday's technology, a poorer version of what is currently available. It is the version you fall out with after you glimpse a shiny new release or update.

I would love to know how you currently decide what to cover.

Martin Gillespie, Bournemouth

It's simple, Martin. Stuart is blindfolded, hung by a rope and lowered into a swimming pool full of games. Whatever he manages to pull out gets covered in the next issue…

Seriously though, it's actually a little less complicated in reality. We simply use anything up to (and including) the Dreamcast as our cut-off point. As a general rule, we don't tend to cover anything later



» Timothy wants more homebrew coverage in the magazine. Who else wants to know what the community is getting up to?

From the forum

EVERY MONTH, **RETRO GAMER** ASKS A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTS THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW...
WHAT VIDEOGAME WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE TURNED INTO A MOVIE?



ID: rossi46
Panzer Dragoon. The computer imagery of today could make an epic of, well, epic proportions.

ID: LeeT
Mikie by Konami. It would be perfect to appeal to the *High School Musical* demographic.

ID: SirClive
Final Fantasy VII. None of this *Spirits Within* or *Advent Children* nonsense, just tell the *FFVII* story in film.

ID: monkey puzzle
Gribbly's Day Out. How mad would that be?

ID: macon
Any *Dizzy* game. I would need to be sober, though, or I would likely be sick.

ID: Shin_Gouki
Metal Gear Solid, with Hugh Jackman as Snake.

ID: tekaotaku
Snatcher! No, hang on, it already borrows from *The Terminator, Blade Runner,* and *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*, so would probably have trouble with copyrights…

ID: yakmag
A big fan of *Narc*. Plenty of big bangs, rocket launchers, and good old-fashioned mindless violence… What more would the teenagers of today want?

ID: Heavy Stylus
Quake, but only because I'd love to see a classic-style Shambler on the big screen. They are just so loveable.



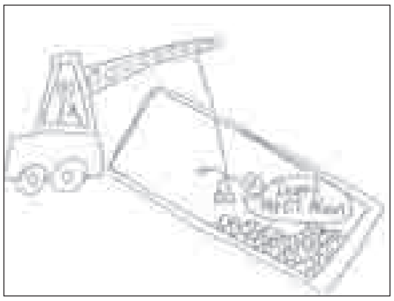
than 2000. When we do break this rule, it's usually a Dreamcast game that we're covering anyway.

Reviewing is slightly different, as we'll often review brand-new titles that 'feel' like retro games. This is admittedly a lot harder to get right (there were big arguments about last month's coverage of Rez HD), but we've yet to receive a single complaint about it.

TOAD WARS

Dear Retro Gamer,
I've been playing through the NES title *Battletoads*, a game that raises many questions that demand to be answered. Do you think **Retro Gamer** sould do a 'making of' feature in the not-too-distant future. Questions I think need answering include, why is the game so hard? Did the designers even play it themselves (it's full of bugs)? Has anyone ever completed it without cheating? And how did they manage to achieve those kinds of graphics on the NES? How much *Turtles* had they watched before deciding to make the game? And why does the music sound so similar to many other Rare games (I know it's the same composer; I'm more interested in the technical aspect)?

And while we're on the subject of music, have you ever noticed that old videogames from the same developer often sound alike. That's interesting, if you ask me. What I also find interesting is that, with experience, you can tell the hardware upon which a game was made by looking at a screenshot or by listening to a piece of music...



» An artist's impression of Stuart and Darran selecting which new games to cover in **Retro Gamer**.

Dan Saeden, via email

You're in luck, Dan. Rare has already discussed the possibility of a feature on Battletoads *with us (we have something else lined up first), so we'll be sure to pass your questions on when we speak to them.*

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



» We didn't manage to get an image of *Star Wars Arcade Trilogy*, so here's a screenshot from *Lego Star Wars* instead.

We can't say that we've really noticed too many similarities between the music from Battletoads *and that of other Rare games of the time, but you're certainly right about being able to spot a machine from game screenshots. It's especially easy when it comes to titles that feature the same hardware boards, as we mentioned in last month's* Magic Sword *Retro Revival.*

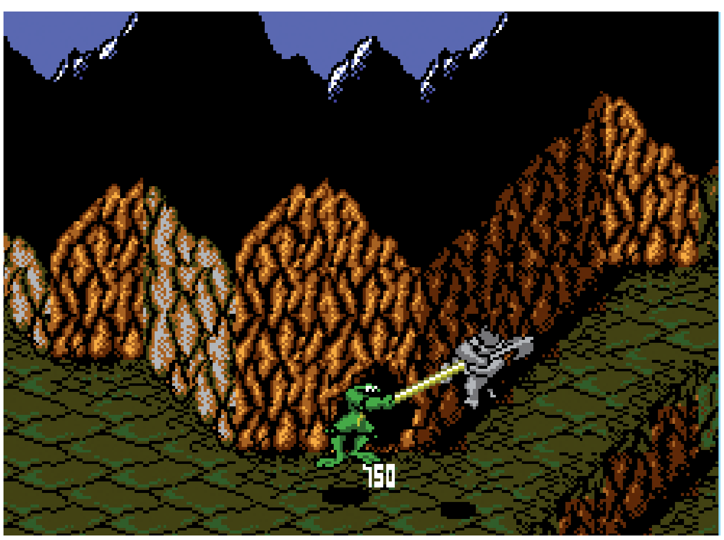
STAR WHYS

Dear Retro Gamer,
Why oh why, with all the rubbish that LucasArts has spewed out over the past few years, has it never released one of the greatest arcade experiences of all time? I'm talking, of course, about the 1998 version of the *Star Wars Trilogy*.

Surely the company must realise that it's sitting on a potential gold mine as I would buy or download it at any cost. Please use your wily journalistic ways to 'force' the guys at LucasArts to consider releasing it for Xbox Live Arcade – or on anything else for that matter. It really is a no brainer.

Mitch, via email

Good call, Mitch. Sega's arcade machine was a fantastic experience, although its sheer lack of depth would probably explain why it never appeared on any home machines at the time. That, and the fact that we doubt any console could have actually done the game justice. A Live Arcade download would certainly be brilliant, but considering how much of a presence both publishers have on Microsoft's service we won't get our hopes up.



» Dan Saeden would like to know why *Battletoads* is so damned hard. Expect an answer from Rare very soon.

DOUBLE KNIGHT

Dear Retro Gamer,
I am an avid Amstrad CPC collector from New Zealand (please, no jokes about the rugby). I first stumbled across **Retro Gamer** when searching for Amstrad gear on eBay UK. Issue four featured an excellent article on the Amstrad CPC range. After reading the piece, I knew I had to have more, and was very happy to discover that it was still being published, so I have bought every issue online ever since.

Brilliant though your magazine is, do you think it would be possible to cover a little more Amstrad CPC stuff in future issues please? Amstrad is by far the greatest UK computer manufacturer ever, and the Amstrad CPC is the greatest home computer. It had everything, running rings around the ZX Spectrum – and who bought that machine and made it better…



My hero is Alan Sugar. He is so great he should be made a double knight. He should be Sir Sir Alan Sugar. We are just seeing the first series of the UK *The Apprentice* (don't tell me who wins) here on TV, and it is great to see Sir Alan in action and still working out of Brentwood House, same as he was over 20 years ago. So please, more Amstrad CPC stuff (yes, I also have issue 19 in which you covered Amsoft). And all hail Sir Alan.

Now I'm saving up to get one of those cool binders… (subtle hint).

Richard Goulstone, New Zealand

*Excellent, another Amstrad fanatic joins the **Retro Gamer** fold. It's a well known fact that both Darran and Stuart are huge fans of the machine, and all freelancers must pledge their commitment to Sugar's computer before they can even consider writing for us. While we've not run as many Amstrad features as we would have liked, quite a few pages have appeared over the last 29 issues. Your cheapest bet would probably be to pick up our eMag, which has all the features in PDF form. Oh, and the winner of* The Apprentice *was… (that's enough of that – Ed).*

OKAY, THIS IS JUST WEIRD

Dear RG
I am writing to ask for your help. When I was a kid I played a great game on my brother's mate's Spectrum. But I can't remember what it was. I remember a part of it had a ship firing bullets that looked like triangles. They were yellow, and the enemies looked like maggots. It was an awesome game, and I would desperately like to find it and buy it on eBay. Does the team have any idea what it could be? I really want to play it. If you can help me, I promise to buy every issue of your mag until I am 50. Please help me find the game, I think it had a Q in the name and it was about £2.99. Cheers.

Ged, via email

Thanks for your letter, Ged. In all seriousness though, you're going to have to give us a little bit more to work with than that. Is this email the result of a recent fever dream by any chance? Look, if you can think up any more detail about this mystery game, get back to us and we'll try our best to help you out. You do know that the Spectrum had quite a few games about space ships that were yellow though? Why not try locking yourself in a room with the lights out and thinking really hard about what the game was like, and then get back in touch with us. Also, if there are any readers out there who think they might know which game Ged was playing, don't hesitate to get in touch.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR IS MURRAY FURTADO, A 37-YEAR-OLD FREELANCE JAVA DEVELOPER WHO HAS A SERIOUS LOVE OF VINTAGE HANDHELD AND TABLE-TOP ELECTRONIC GAMES, DATING FROM THE MID-SEVENTIES TO THE MID-EIGHTIES





» Coleco's range of mini arcade games, which were licensed versions of *Pac-Man*, *Ms Pac-Man*, *Frogger*, *Galaxian*, and *Donkey Kong*, have great side-art stickers in the vein of their full-size parents.









» Here is my collection of Tomy robots from the early-Eighties. The selection includes Omnibot, Verbot, Spotbot, Hootbot, Dustbot, Omnibot Jr, Crackbot, Dingbot, and Flipbot.







» I like collecting VFD, LED, and colour LCD handhelds because it is possible to collect a whole set without needing a warehouse to store them all in. Plus, I like the fact that they represent a lost technological era.



» For me, the great charm of vintage handhelds is that each console is a dedicated game – generally, you can't plug in a new cartridge – you have to buy a whole new console. A truly antiquated notion these days. This means that each game needs its own case design. It's the range of funky retro shapes that I love so much.



» With *3D Stereo Skyfighters* (top left) and *Sherman Attack*, Tomy added stereo speakers to the mix. The 3D effect is quite convincing, and if you think about it, 3D games haven't really come on much since then.



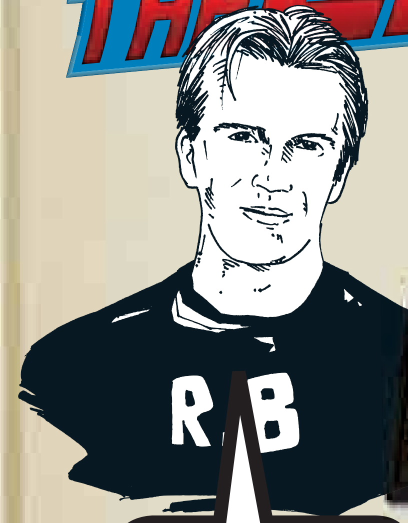


» A great coffee-table reference book for the vintage handheld genre is the out-of-print *Electronic Plastic*. The best internet resource on the subject is www.handheldmuseum.com – all the hardcore collectors hang out on this forum. Swing by and say hello. My handle is Panic Button.

If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1984



May 1984 – C16 Plus/4 equals new machines from Commodore, The Evil Dead gets new life, Gargoyle Games and US Gold both debut and a buggered-up Attic affects JSW. Richard Burton pokes around for a cure…



A good month for Commodore begins with the announcement that two new machines would be making their UK debuts at the Commodore Computer Show at the Novotel in London in July. The C16 and Plus/4 had very similar specifications, with the same graphics resolution, sound capabilities and CPU, but the C16 had less memory.

The C16 replaced the proposed, but later aborted, launch of the C116 in the UK, while the Commodore Plus/4 suffered a name change, morphing from the C264 to its new moniker. The C116 did manage to sell in small numbers in Germany, but with the machine essentially being a cut-down version of the C16 with the look of a Plus/4, it was more of a cry for help to the home computer industry rather than a ground-breaking system.

The Plus/4 did have improved BASIC over the C64 but, strangely, had the hardware sprites and SID chip removed. Commercial suicide you say?

Both the C16 and Plus/4 would prove to be less than popular with the computer-buying public and it was hard to see what the point of the two machines was, as Commodore stated they weren't replacements for the existing C64 and VIC-20 machines and yet they didn't have the spec to really attract new buyers.



» Fred Harris had a new beard and a new programming-based TV show. No, it wasn't '*Chock-A-Colour-Block*'…

The Sinclair printer was no more. Yes, indeed, the little thermal peripheral that printed on a silver toilet roll rather than conventional paper, was discontinued by Sinclair due to falling sales. The special aluminised paper would still be made available in small quantities, though, to appease existing users who would insist on potentially setting fire to their house in the name of hard copy.



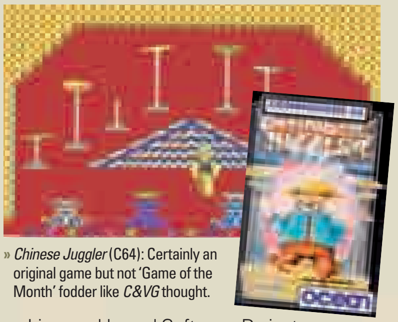
» *Jet Set Willy* (Spectrum): Who would think that one stray arrow would cause such a palaver? Poke 59901,82 to cure all ills.

Sinclair Vehicles was busy getting its prototype electric car built and tested with pre-production builds at the Hoover plant in Wales about to commence. With all being well, the first Sinclair car would be hitting the shops, pedestrians and the soft verges of the country around Spring 1985. Oh dear.

While not appearing on *Play School* and peddling around in a small car (not a C5, it was better than that…) on *Chock-A-Block*, Fred Harris was found fronting a brand new TV series targeting would-be programmers. The programme, *Me & My Micro*, was shown on ITV regions and gave examples of programming in BASIC with a view to creating simple games but squarely aimed at the younger viewers.



» Sir Clive's vision for the future of transportation was taking shape... but what is he doing under that waterproof sheet?



» *Chinese Juggler* (C64): Certainly an original game but not 'Game of the Month' fodder like *C&VG* thought.

Liverpool-based Software Projects was faced with a dilemma. Gamers who had bought *Jet Set Willy* had found a bug that caused seemingly random infinite death when entering certain rooms after passing through The Attic.

The company – never one to waste time playtesting a game properly – promptly gave out a press release, which stated: "Once you have visited The Attic, your very presence there will trigger a chain reaction in The Chapel. The four guardians there will go to The Kitchen, West of Kitchen, East Wall Base and Cuckoo's Nest, making short cuts through them impossible as you will encounter instant death when entering those rooms." This was later released as a fully fledged one-page advert in *Crash*.

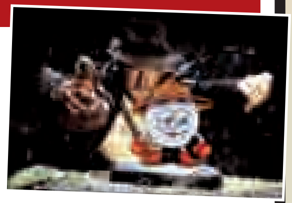
So it was a lash-up then. Still, it was a splendid attempt at blagging it and the 'Attic Bug' clearly didn't affect software sales.

Newly set-up software house Palace Software announced that its first game would be a conversion of the horror movie *The Evil Dead* starring Bruce Campbell. With



» *Evil Dead* (C64): The only way to stop those possessed by the spirits of the ZX81 is through the act of... bodily dismemberment.

1984

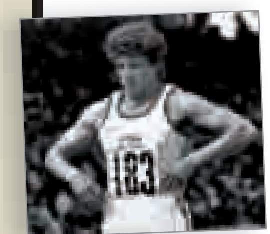


» *'Indiana Jones & The Eggnoggers Of Doom'* – the title never caught on and was scrapped.

8 May saw the Soviet Union announce it would boycott the forthcoming Olympic Games being held in Los Angeles, just three months before they were due to begin. The Soviet reasoning behind the boycott was that the Games had become too commercialised and they also raised concerns about the security of their Soviet team.

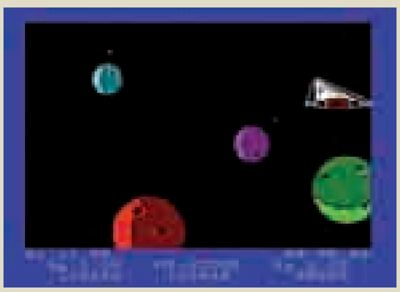
Similarly, the Americans had boycotted the Moscow Olympics four years previous, along with over 60 other nations, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Tit for tat? Almost certainly…

Along with the Soviets, virtually all the Eastern Bloc nations, bar Romania, boycotted the event with 14 nations declining to take part. All very disappointing for the spectacle itself, considering some of the world's best athletes hailed from these countries. The opportunity to see the muscle-bound East German moustached hammer-throwing women would simply have to wait.



» Big muscles, a big tash and buttocks that could crack walnuts… and that's just the women…

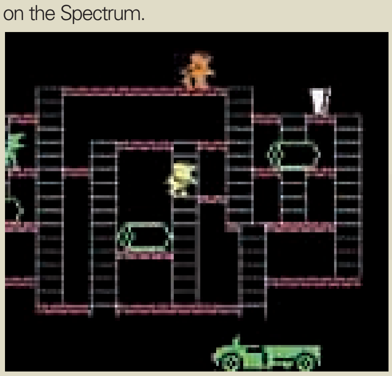
23 May saw the second *Indiana Jones* movie, *The Temple Of Doom*, receive its world premiere in the USA with the UK release following in June. The film was originally going to be titled *The Temple Of Death* but it was deemed to be too dark. The film was also responsible for sales of chilled monkey brains becoming a top seller for Tesco during the summer months.



» *Ad Astra* (Spectrum): Meaning "to the stars" in Latin, it was a classy shoot-'em-up from Gargoyle Games. Placet.

the video being distributed by a certain Palace Video Group, it no doubt helped enormously in attaining a licensing agreement for its smaller sister company. It was planned for release on the C64 and Spectrum, although the Spectrum version was only available, eventually, as a freebie with the release of Palace's *Cauldron* game. Groovy.

Another new software house also had its first offering ready for sale. Gargoyle Games was releasing its slick shoot-'em-up, *Ad Astra*, on the Spectrum.



» [Arcade] *Track & Field*: Play this for an hour a day and never play the piano again.

Moreover, another new label was also releasing its first gaming offering. CentreSoft of Birmingham was producing a range of games under the banner of its new software division, US Gold. Its initial aim was to convert existing hit titles from the USA onto 8-bit UK systems with Beach Head being its first release, initially on the Commodore 64 with other 8-bit conversions to follow. It turned out to be an enormous hit.

Spectrum magazine *Crash* finally introduced their Crash Smash status for top games and the first ever recipient was *Jet Set Willy* (Software Projects). Other members of the Smash club were *Orc Attack* (Creative Sparks) and *Codename Mat* (Micromega).

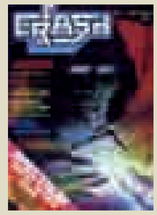
The often-overlooked magazine *TV Gamer* reviewed a host of new oddities, including the strangely named *Captain Sticky's Gold* (English Software, Atari XL). Quite what he had done to get his bullion so clammy is probably best left unsaid… Putting that game to one side, other reviews included *Moon Buggy* (Anirog, Spectrum) and *Jet Boot Jack* (English Software, Atari XL).

Computer & Video Games plumped for *Chinese Juggler* (Ocean, C64) as its Game of the Month. Trailing behind, but still rating highly, were *Trashman* (New Generation Software, Spectrum), *Troopa Truck* (Rabbit Software, C64), *Beach Head* (US Gold, C64), *Jet Set Willy* (Software Projects, Spectrum) and *Bear Bovver* (Artic Computing, C64).

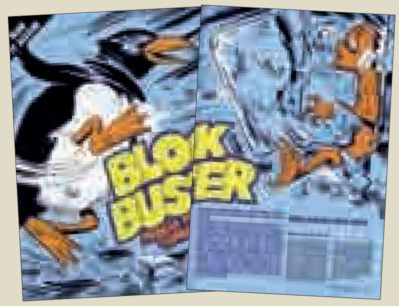
Your Computer, the monthly magazine thicker than a telephone directory, took a look at *Sorcery* (Virgin, Spectrum), *Legion* (Software Projects, BBC), *Altair 4* (Lyversoft, VIC-20), *Olympimania* (Automata, Spectrum), *North Sea Oil* (Shards Software, Dragon 32) and *Lords Of Time* (Level 9, BBC).

THIS MONTH IN…

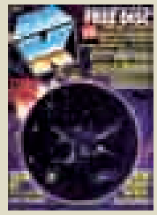
CRASH



The Spectrum magazine included a feature on *Pengo*-style games, running its rule across five not dissimilar games. Among the block-pushing contenders were *Dodo* (Blaby), *Pengy* (Micromania), *Freez'Bees* (Silversoft) and *Eskimo Eddie* (Ocean), with the eventual favourite, *Push Off* (Software Projects), coming out on top.



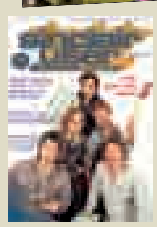
BIG K



Issue 2 of *Big K*, complete with covermounted flexi disk, ran an article on arcade machine repairs. It was nothing too in-depth, more of a 'look at' than a 'how to', but it did feature some classic machines, including *Defender, Mr Do!* and the splendid *Discs Of Tron*.



SINCLAIR USER



Sinclair User once again entered the twilight zone with its feature on strange Spectrum owners. A band called Mensana (in honour of Sir Clive chairing Mensa) discussed how they create music with the help of a homemade interface between the Spectrum and their instruments. Beep beep beepity beep.



CHARTS

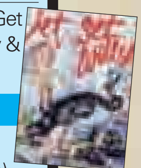
MAY 1984

MUSIC

1. The Reflex (Duran Duran)
2. Automatic (The Pointer Sisters)
3. Against All Odds (Take A Look At Me Now) – (Phil Collins)
4. I Want To Break Free (Queen)
5. One Love/People Get Ready (Bob Marley & The Wailers)

SPECTRUM

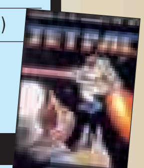
1. Jet Set Willy (Software Projects)
2. Atic Atac (Ultimate)
3. Scuba Dive (Durell)
4. Hunchback (Ocean)
5. Manic Miner (Software Projects)





COMMODORE 64

1. Manic Miner (Software Projects)
2. Hunchback (Ocean)
3. Pedro (Imagine)
4. Mr Wimpy (Ocean)
5. Revenge Of The Mutant Camels (Llamasoft)



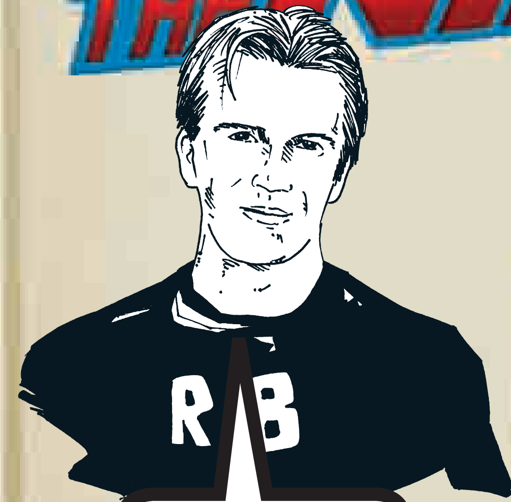
VIC 20

1. Jet Pac (Ultimate)
2. Krazy Kong (Interceptor)
3. Submarine Commander (Thorn)
4. Duckshoot (Mastertronic)
5. Snooker (Visions)

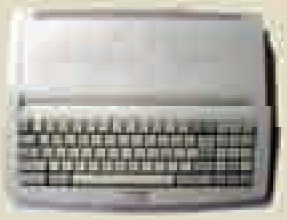


BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1990



August 1990 – Hello to new Amstrads, goodbye to old software houses, Shadow Of The Beast 2 arrives, Ballblazer becomes Master Blazer and Nintendo cut NES prices on Ninja Turtle pack. Richard Burton wades into the sewer and finds pizza…



» The Amstrad 6128 Plus came complete with cartridge slot for games like *Burnin' Rubber.*

Amstrad, thoroughly determined not to embrace the 16-bit era, finally revealed what its new range of machines would look like and when they would officially be released.

The three new 8-bit machines, the 464 Plus, 6128 Plus and the GX4000 games console were redesigned and styled with a hint of Amiga about them. Even the new Amstrad logo emblazoned on the computer casing had more than a passing resemblance to the Commodore machine.

Priced at £329, £429 and £99 respectively, what exactly were the Plus machines going to give you? A cartridge slot for games was the most obvious addition, which promised more arcade quality games on the systems. Inside, a custom chip was added to take the weight of graphics processing away from the Z80 processor, allowing enhanced graphics, smoother scrolling and a much larger colour palette.

All three machines would come with *Burnin' Rubber* from Ocean, on cartridge, and would be available from September.

Not to be outdone, Commodore also officially announced the release of its C64 Games System for September. The C64GS would cost £99 pounds and would come with a cartridge containing four games, *Flimbo's Quest* and *International Soccer* being among the freebie gaming fare on offer.

Nintendo, having released a new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* console bundle, surprised gamers and reviewers alike by cutting the price of its NES bundle to £79, presumably targeting Amstrad and Commodore's new machines with a more attractively priced setup. Comparing the GX4000 and C64GS places in history to that of the NES, it's fair to say the move was a well judged one…

Two software houses shuffled off their mortal coils this month. Grandslam, who had only recently been spending big collecting multiple licensing deals, of which Liverpool FC was the latest, went belly up. Among its past releases were some fairly good titles, including *Pac-Land* and *Space Harrier 2,* which would ensure that another party would pick up the rights to its back catalogue.

The same can't be said of Tynesoft, the other software house casualty this month. Tynesoft concentrated its efforts mainly on re-releasing older games, most of which were of dubious quality. It was also responsible for such gaming gems as *Auf Wiedersehen Pet, Beverly Hills Cop* and the truly awesome offering of *Super Gran.*

Sega unveiled its latest release, *Power Drift,* for the PC Engine. The less popular sibling to *Out Run* was available for £34.99. Unfortunately, it was all show and no substance, with pretty but jerky graphics. Versions for the PC, Amiga and ST would shortly follow.

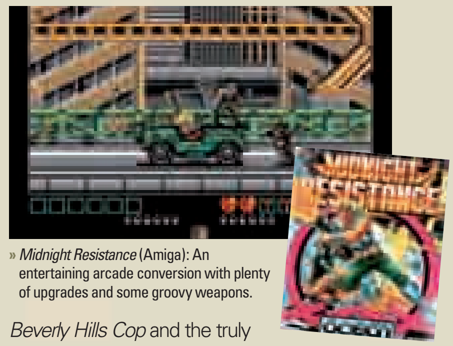
Continuing the racing theme, Titus announced that it had almost completed *Fire & Forget II,* which would be released on an array of formats, including the Master System.

Electronic Arts had *Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer* ready for release on the Amiga and Atari ST, promising flights of fancy in new aircraft, including the Space Shuttle. Having been a staple flight simulation on the 8-bit machines for years, the enhanced version would prove to be old hat on the new generation of computers.

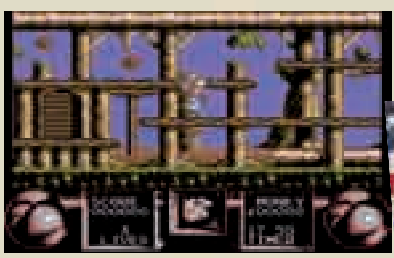
Psygnosis let slip that *Shadow Of The Beast 2,* the sequel to its hugely successful first game, should be ready to ship by the end of the month. Reflections, the developer for the *Beast* series, was also working on *Awesome,* a mishmash of sub-games with



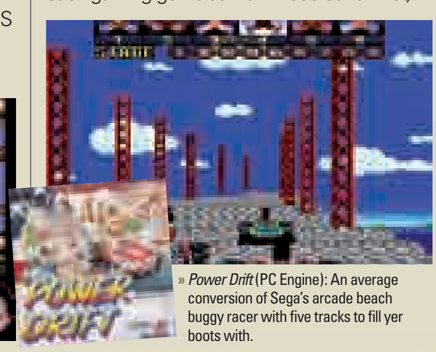
» *Racing Hero* and *Smash TV* – two new arcade machines out this month and reviewed by *C&VG* magazine.



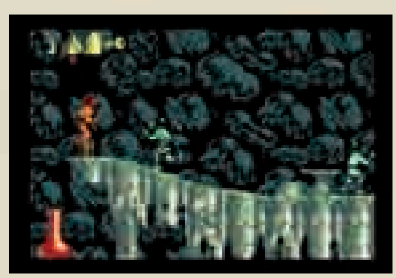
» *Midnight Resistance* (Amiga): An entertaining arcade conversion with plenty of upgrades and some groovy weapons.



» Two of the four games found on the cartridge given away with the new C64GS console were *Flimbo's Quest* & *International Soccer.*



» *Power Drift* (PC Engine): An average conversion of Sega's arcade beach buggy racer with five tracks to fill yer boots with.



» *Shadow Of The Beast 2* (Amiga): Awesome graphics and oodles of atmosphere, *Shadow Of The Beast 2* was simply superb.

1990

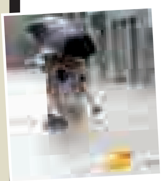
AUGUST NEWS



» The space probe Magellan mapped and took readings of Venus with its superb testing equipment.

3 August saw the highest temperature recorded in the UK. The weather station in Leicestershire recorded a temperature of 99ºF. It was bettered in 2003 with a temperature of 100.6ºF in Gravesend, Kent. Scorchio.

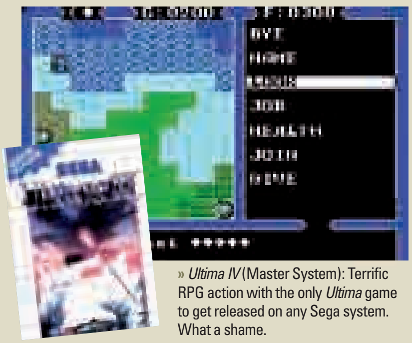
After a 15-month journey, the Magellan spacecraft, sent to map the surface of Venus, finally arrived at its destination on 10 August. It spent four years radar mapping the planet before crashing to the surface in October 1994. It successfully mapped 99 per cent of the surface, concluding that 85 per cent of the planet's surface was active volcanoes. Scorchio.



» A typical British summer usually features knotted-hanky headwear and torrential rain. Lovely.

24 August saw the release of long-term hostage, Irishman Brian Keenan, by his Islamic kidnappers in Beirut, Lebanon. The teacher, who had been holding a post at the American University of Beirut, had been kidnapped back in April 1986 and had spent more than 50 months in captivity in a hot, humid cell. Scorchio.

Hostage negotiations between Iran, acting on behalf of Ireland, and the kidnappers eventually led to Mr Keenan being freed, although several other hostages held by the same group, including John McCarthy and Terry Waite, would remain imprisoned. They would be released in August and November 1991, respectively.



» *Ultima IV* (Master System): Terrific RPG action with the only *Ultima* game to get released on any Sega system. What a shame.

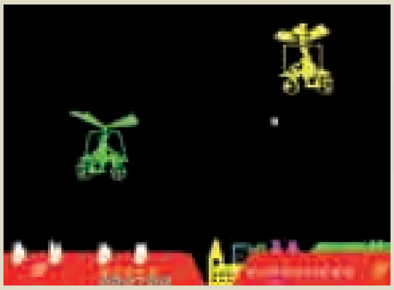


» *Thunderforce 3* (Sega Mega Drive): One of the finest side-scrolling shooters on the Mega Drive and the best game in the series.

hints of *Elite, Space Harrier* and *Gauntlet* buried in its gameplay. It was pencilled in for an end-of-year release. Both games would set you back a startling £34.95, although you would get a "free" T-shirt as part of the glossy packaging.

The classic Lucasfilm game *Ballblazer* was finally getting converted onto the PC, ST and Amiga, thanks to the guys at Rainbow Arts. The futuristic sports sim would also undergo a name change on its way to the 16-bit machines, transforming into *Master Blazer,* which would be available in time for Christmas. Conversions of other Lucasfilm 8-bit games, *The Eidolon* and *Rescue On Fractalus!*, were also hinted at but failed to surface.

Among the fine array of reviews in *Zero* magazine, the Zero Hero cream of the crop



» *Super Gran* (Spectrum): Just one of the many exceedingly pants offerings from the not-so-mighty (and now liquidated) Tynesoft.

were *Midnight Resistance* (Ocean, Amiga), *Unreal* (Ubisoft, Amiga), *PGA Tour Golf* (Electronic Arts, PC), *Flight Of The Intruder* (Mirrorsoft, PC), *Kick Off 2* (Anco, Amiga) and *Flood* (Electronic Arts, Amiga).

The Games Machine stuck their seal of approval onto *Magician Lord* (SNK, Neo Geo AES), *Sly Spy: Secret Agent* (Ocean, Amiga/ST), *Unreal* (Ubisoft, Amiga), *Venus The Flytrap* (Gremlin Graphics, Amiga), *Treasure Trap* (Electronic Zoo, Amiga), *Kick Off 2* (Anco, Amiga) and *BSS Jane Seymour* (Gremlin Graphics, Amiga).

The Games Machine magazine itself was going through a bit of a metamorphosis, with the news that the next issue, 34, would be the last. A new multiformat magazine would rise from its burnt-out carcass – *Raze.*

While *Computer & Video Games* concurred with the other publications on many of their choices for games of the month, they also squeezed in reviews of two new arcade games, both of which scored highly. The 10p guzzling duo was *Smash TV* and Sega's new motorbike themed racer, *Racing Hero.*

On the consoles, *Thunderforce III* (Sega, Mega Drive) had *C&VG* reviewing staff duffing in their undergarments. *Ultima IV* (Sega/Origin, Master System) was also deemed good enough to get a C&VG Hit thumbs-up.

THIS MONTH IN...

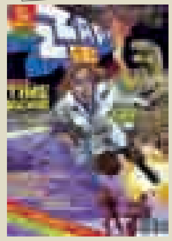
ACE



ACE took a look at new console releases at the latest Consumer Electronics Show in the USA. Among the games previewed this month were *R-Type, Paperboy* and *RoboCop* (which were all due for a monochrome release on the Game Boy), as well as a cracking NES conversion of the C64 classic, *The Last Ninja.*



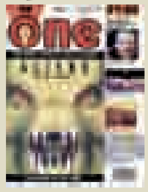
ZZAP!



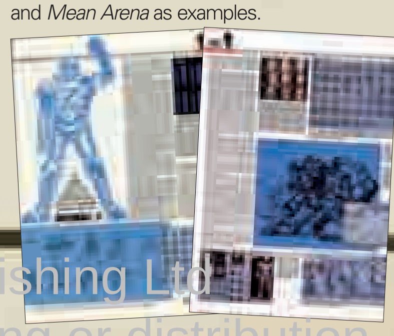
Issue 64 saw a change of cover artist with Oliver Frey taking a back seat. Guest artist, Ron Smith, had drawn a huge amount of the early years of Judge Dredd in *2000AD,* including *The Judge Child* epic. Inside the magazine… a Sizzler called *Turrican…*



THE ONE



Issue 23 of *The One* saw a feature by Kati Hamza (formerly of *Crash* and *Zzap!*) previewing the latest offering from The Bitmap Brothers, *Speedball 2.* This fitted in nicely with another of Hamza's articles in the same issue on future sports, highlighting *2000AD* (again) and citing the *Harlem Heroes* and *Mean Arena* as examples.



CHARTS

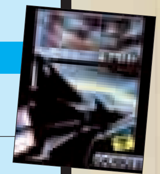
AUGUST 1990

AMIGA



1. Kick Off 2 (Anco)
2. Their Finest Hour (Lucasfilm/US Gold)
3. Italy 1990 (US Gold)
4. A.M.O.S. (Mandarin)
5. Emlyn Hughes International Soccer (Audiogenic)

ATARI ST



1. F-29 Retaliator (Ocean)
2. Emlyn Hughes International Soccer (Audiogenic)
3. Ghosts 'n Goblins (Elite)
4. Italy 1990 (US Gold)
5. World Cup Italia '90 (Virgin)

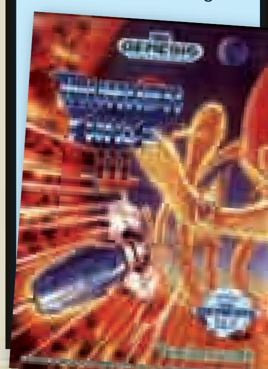
PC



1. Their Finest Hour (Lucasfilm)
2. 688 Attack Sub (Electronic Arts)
3. King's Quest Triple Pack (Sierra)
4. Ultima VI (Mindscape/Origin)
5. Football Manager (Addictive)

SEGA MEGA DRIVE

1. Thunderforce III (Sega/Technosoft)
2. Whip Rush (Sega/Renovation)
3. DJ Boy (Sega/Kaneko)
4. Super Shinobi (Sega)
5. Afterburner II (Sega)



JURASSIC PARK

FIFTEEN YEARS SINCE THE MAKING

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **GENRE:** GUN GAME
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE (SYSTEM 32)
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A LOT OF DOUGH



HISTORY

To give credit where it's due, the *Jurassic Park* franchise has always managed to keep its scaly snout out of videogame ditch water. The movie-born franchise even used a colossal stomping foot to break down high-voltage fences and spread its monstrous mass across various game genres.

Many people consider Sega's sublime *Lost World* arcade game to be the zenith of the franchise. However, there is, in our opinion, a *Jurassic Park* gun game, also by Sega, that's slightly better than that. It's an old school on-rails shooter working from the same System 32 hardware as Sega's Rad Mobile.

If you're an arcade collector and lucky enough to dig up a fossilised *Jurassic Park* arcade cab, be sure to snap it up quick. The Video Arcade Preservation Society ranks *Jurassic Park*'s obscurity as 1 out of 100 (with 100 being awarded to the most common arcade machines), based on its ownership records.

Of course, we don't recommend shelling out for the game based solely on its scarcity; the game is brilliant fun too. Perched inside a Jeep, you and a pal would embark on a daring rollercoaster ride through the Isla Nubla that begins with the film's memorable on-rails tour guide and ends with a daring chase in the visitor centre. Sega would cleverly introduce the game as an unsanctioned sequel to the film by claiming that you're returning to the park for an impractical hunting expedition. This masterstroke allowed Sega to go completely wild, leave its mark and add wave after wave of stampeding dinosaurs.

There was also a brilliant sense of tongue-in-check humour, which built up to a dramatic, if somewhat absurd, drive up the lengthy neck of a Brachiosaurus. There's something inherently wrong with the whole ethos of *Jurassic Park*. We're sure that had a 1996 film been released about a zoo of endangered species escaping captivity, therefore forcing a child-phobic zoologist to jump into a Jeep and pop several caps into the brains of confused pandas and rhinos, a few animal lovers would have some choice words to say.

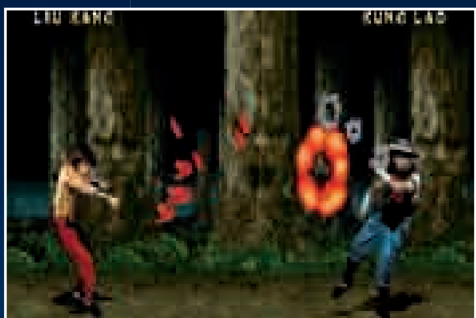



credits 6

RETRO GAMER'S **TOP**



It's time for us to don bandanas, a pair of fighting gloves and uppercut some waterfalls before sticking our hands into a trough of broken glass. Welcome to the true 'stage of history' as Stuart and Darran duke it out against Retro Gamer's top 25 beat-'em-ups



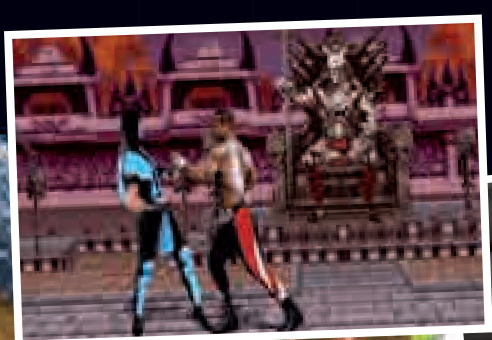
Mortal Kombat II

Year: 1993

Publisher: Midway

This game splits opinion in the **RG** office. In all honesty, we're all in agreement that *Mortal Kombat* isn't a great fighting game – it certainly hasn't aged too well (boot the game up on the Mega Drive for unmitigated proof of that). However, the franchise deserves special mention just for the amount of guts it displayed when it was released. Blood, Fatalities and essentially trying to do everything *Street Fighter II* wasn't (which, if you think about it, was actually pretty insane) and somehow, with their peculiar *Enter The Dragon*-themed Halloween party fighter, John Tobias and Ed Boon would pull it off.

It was their sequel that really upped the ante though, dropping the dark tones of the original for a more tongue-in-cheek approach that suited the series a lot better. With the addition of Babalities, Friendships, and even in-house jokes about crisped bread, you had a real sense that the team were having a lot of fun putting the game together, a fun that rubbed off brilliantly.





Bushido Blade

Year: 1998

Publisher: SquareSoft

To be fair, Square's track record with fighters isn't particularly hot. It's known for making cult fighting games (*Tobal No 1* being one that springs to mind), and by cult we mean a handful of people fawn over them when they're brought up in conversation and cut relationship ties if anything nasty is said about them.

We fall in such a category whenever *Bushido Blade* is mouthed. Essentially a three-dimensioned oriental *Barbarian*, *Bushido Blade*'s mantra was all about realism, realism and more realism. There are no time limits or health bars; instead, wins are decided with the game's innovative Body Damage System. Get struck on the leg with a rapier and your character will be forced to continue the fight on one knee, take a timely blade to the head and he won't be able to continue the fight with a face. Oh, and you also had a nifty POV mode to help heighten the realism.

Add to this the vast 3D stages that you could explore and occasionally interact with and the notion that you had to fight honourably (so no back-stabbing or calling out each other's sisters) and *Bushido Blade* is perhaps as close as it gets to realistic sword-fight shenanigans.



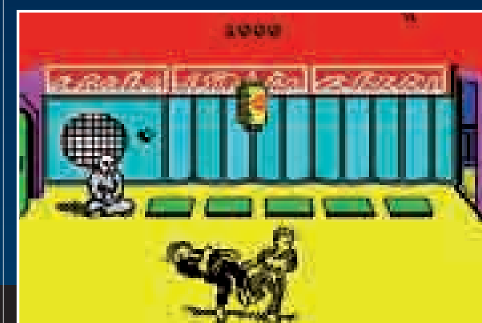
The Way Of The Exploding Fist

Year: 1985

Publisher: Melbourne House

For many, the beat-'em-up genre didn't really evolve and take off until the advent of 16-bit gaming. Nevertheless, there were some solid fighters available on the 8-bit computers and Melbourne House's *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* is arguably one of the best.

Thanks to a combination of joystick directions and button presses, it was possible to pull off an impressive amount of moves, while a selection of different backgrounds (four in total) ensured that there was always something to look at while you were caning your opponent. Best of all though was the authentic scoring system called 'shobu nihon kumite', which helped give *Fist* a realism that few other 8-bit fighters were able to match. There was even a bull-punching bonus stage to add a little variety to all the hardcore fighting. Hiyah!



World Heroes 2

Year: 1993

Publisher: SNK

This awesome brawler from SNK is the only game in the top 25 that doubles as a history lesson, as each character is based on a significant or insignificant character from history. Captain Kidd is based on the famous Scottish explorer William Kidd. Joan of Arc is here, as is Rasputin and so the list goes on all the way through to erm, Joe Montana. A heady mix of everything Alpha Denshi did best, this is a true hybrid of *Art Of Fighting* and *Samurai Shodown*. A minute to learn and a lifetime to master certainly applies here.

Throw in a quirky Deathmatch mode, where two combatants battle each other against the clock for the greatest share of one health bar, then evolve that for the two-player mode and throw in some scenery obstacles and traps and it becomes incredibly difficult to see why this didn't find love in the mainstream. Visually the game still holds all of its charm, and while it may have been superseded in the looks department by many titles since, the feel of the game, like that of its characters, remains timeless. When Captain Kidd launches a ghostly galleon across the screen, you know that you are playing something very special indeed.



TOP 25 BEAT-EM-UPS



Killer Instinct Gold

Year: 1994

Publisher: Midway

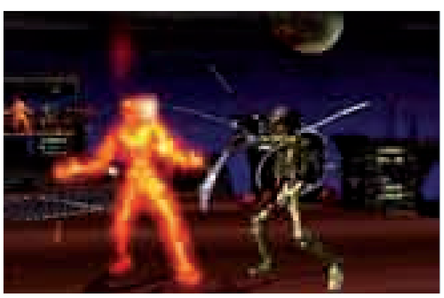
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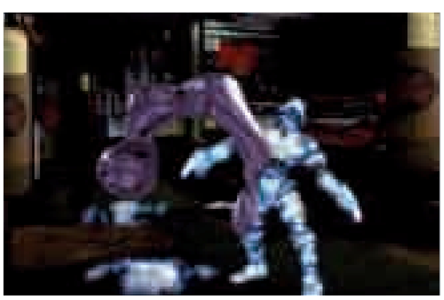
After the tat that was Mirage's *Rise Of The Robots, Killer Instinct* proved that we Brits could pull a great fighting game from our hats when we put our mind to it.

Utilising the Silicon Graphics terminals that were first wielded in *Donkey Kong Country,* Rare created a sinewy looking arcade brawler that would spawn one brilliant sequel and two sublime home console ports.

On paper, this could have been a load of tosh. It was packed with ugly looking combatants with predictable names. It also had so many features, combos and specials that it could have proven a mess of game styles. You're getting two variations of the Finishing Move, Automatic Combos, Combo Breakers plus the Ultra Combo: a move that lets you string together ridiculously long 80+ hit attacks.

Typically, Rare would rise to the challenge and deliver a game strong enough to take on the bleak and violent *MK* franchise and claim 'Supreme Victory'.









Dead Or Alive 2

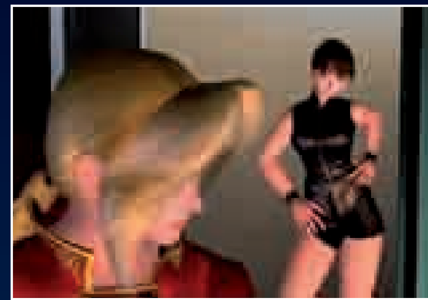
Year: 2000

Publisher: Acclaim

20

Whether it's realism, special moves or, in *Dead Or Alive*'s case, realistic boob physics, it seems that many fighters employ a unique gameplay pull; something that no other game can swank.

DOA began life in the arcades, and was sold as a prettier version of *Tekken* that let you dress your fighters up like a doll. This peculiar feature remained in the DC's sublime port of Team Ninja's popular arcade sequel, but this time the apparel would prove more chic for the boys and skimpier for the girls.



Tecmo also made the fights more fun by letting fighters interact with hazards. And *DOA*'s 'janken'-style combat, made up from attacks, holds and throws, would allow for tense bouts of quick-draw reaction as you read your opponent's attacks to secure a victory.

"Vampire Savior is brilliantly frenetic and has some of the most imaginative special moves we've ever seen in a beat-'em-up"

Vampire Savior

Year: 1997

Publisher: Capcom

19

Of the three *DarkStalkers* games (to keep things simple we're not including all the tweaked reissues and Japanese-only, multi-titled previous game amalgamations), *Vampire Savior* (which, in simpler terms, is just *DarkStalkers 3*) is the best of the three 'main' games that were released in the series.

We'd happily give this game an honourable mention solely for Capcom turning Little Red Riding Hood (Baby Bonnie Hood) into a sinister schizophrenic, gun-toting psychopath. But delve a little deeper into the game, and some brilliant changes to the fighting mechanics can be found.

Capcom dropped the conventional two-round spats for two health bars that would be fought across one round. The game also adopted self-replenishing health and even more wacky attacks. *Vampire Savior* is brilliantly frenetic and boasts some of the most imaginative and unusual special moves we've ever seen in a fighting game. And don't get us started on the surreal endings, we're still trying to get that Morgan 'END/GAME' (from **RG** 46) out of our heads… the one where she goes all *Little Britain* on her sister.







"If you're a fan of either company, you owe it to yourself to give the excellent Capcom Vs SNK a whirl"



Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!

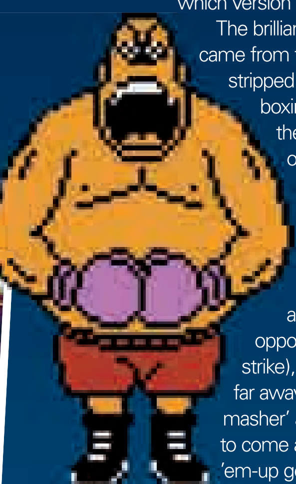
■ **Year:** 1987

18

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo

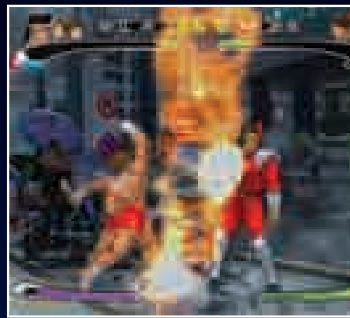
Although it has little in common with the arcade game it's based on, the NES port of *Punch-Out!!* proved to be a real haymaker when it was released in 1987.

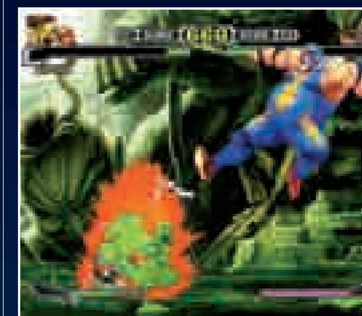
Deftly, for its NES port of its own arcade fighter, Nintendo dropped its faceless, wireframe pugilist for a *Cinderella Man*-style yarn about a fighter working his way up through a roster of quirky combatants that stood between him and a dream matchup with Mike Tyson (or Mr Dream – depending on which version you had).



The brilliance of *Punch-Out!!* came from the way Nintendo stripped down the sport of boxing. Ironically, despite the action being shared over two buttons (matches could only be won by learning the peculiar fight patterns of your opponents and waiting for the opportune moment to strike), *Punch-Out!!* is as far away from a 'button masher' as you're ever likely to come across in the beat-'em-up genre.







Capcom Vs SNK

■ **Year:** 2000

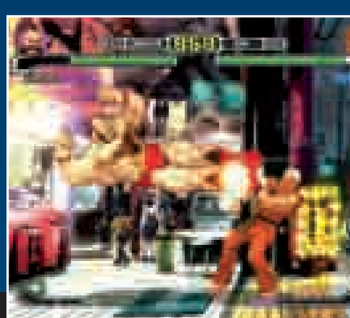
■ **Publisher:** Capcom

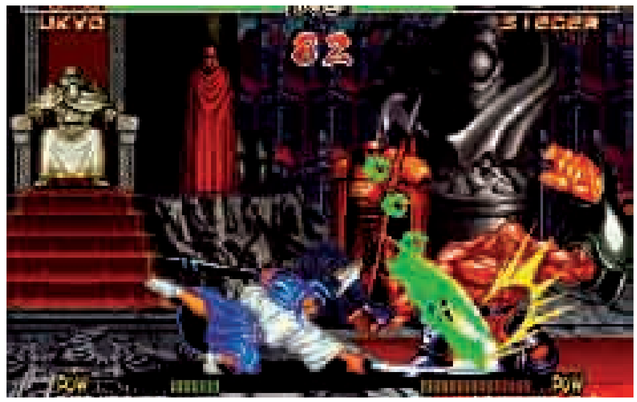
17

We'd always wondered how Ryu would fare in a scrap against Terry Bogard, or if Zangief's spinning piledriver would be effective against Geese Howard, and thanks to *Capcom Vs SNK* we finally found out.

First released eight years ago and featuring a stunning roster of 33 different characters – Capcom's Dan and SNK's Joe Higashi feature in the Japanese-only *Pro* edition – *Capcom Vs SNK* is a brilliantly refreshing brawler that pits some of the finest fighters from both companies against each other. Granted, the vast majority of pugilists are from *Street Fighter* and *The King Of Fighters*, but there's no denying that the end result is a beautifully crafted fighter.

Using the new Ratio mode – you're allowed four slots with fighters costing from one to four points – *Capcom Vs SNK* spiced things up by adding Groove modes (from *The King Of Fighters* and *Street Fighter Alpha*) to add flexibility to a solid fighting system. If you're a fan of either company, you owe it to yourself to give this excellent fighter a whirl.





Samurai Shodown II

■ **Year:** 1994

■ **Publisher:** SNK

16

Maybe it's because it found itself being released on the cusp of a new dawn of 3D fighters but weirdly enough, despite the first *Samurai Shodown* being a massive arcade hit for SNK in the US and garnering plenty of fans, this sequel didn't perform too well in the arcades. And that's a shame because *Samurai Shodown II* is not only considered the zenith of the series, but it's considered by many (not us mind) to be the pinnacle fighter of SNK.

For the follow-up to *Samurai Shodown*, SNK pulled out all the stops – creating a fighting game that would offer a lot more depth and required a lot more dissecting than Capcom's seminal 2D brawler. Adding four more characters, refining brilliantly the fighting and controls and adding POW finishing moves and a few tasty Easter eggs, SNK had, at that point in time, raised the bar considerably for the 2D fighting genre. If you're a fan of the first game and have yet to experience this, you really should, it's sublime.



Top 25 Beat-'Em-Ups



Power Stone 2

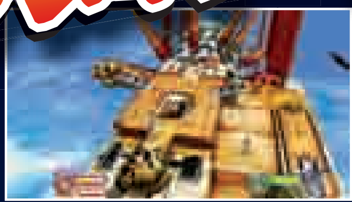
■ **Year:** 2000

■ **Publisher:** Eidos/Capcom

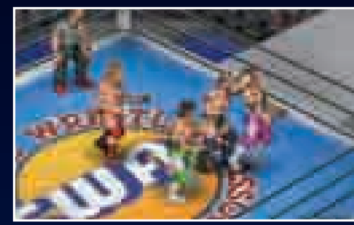
15

This is without a doubt the finest 3D fighting game that Capcom has ever made (although *Rival Schools 2* comes pretty close). *Power Stone* focused on the principle of risk and reward better than any other fighting game on this list. The ethos that you could either bat your opponents with randomly scattered cartoon weaponry – swords, bear traps, even magazines – or collect three power-giving stones to turn your character into a super-being allowed *Power Stone* to make inspired use of fight arenas. Yes, oddly enough, it's the wonderfully erratic and restless stages that are the real stars, and it takes this sequel to really hit that home.

The Cave level with the *Indiana Jones*-style boulder, the warplane stage that would dismantle in midair forcing you to continue the fight in a state of freefall, four-player melee action and an innovative adventure mode that allowed you to mix and trade the weapons, meant the sheer amount of enjoyment packed into this single disc was ridiculous.









Fire Pro Wrestling

■ **Year:** 1989

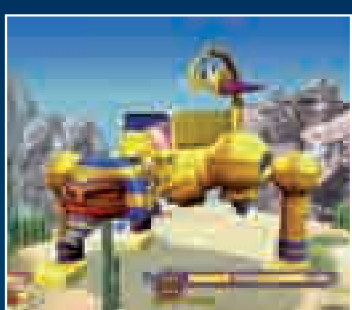
■ **Publisher:** Human

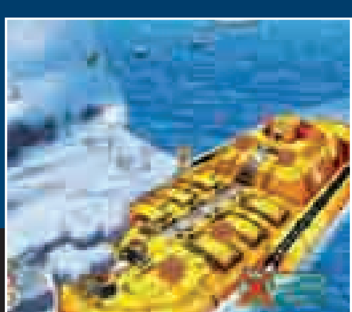
13

Spanning a career of over 40 games across nine platforms and creating a popular community of forum members who shoot the breeze about the series at www.fireproclub.com, it has to be said that the *Fire Pro* games must be doing something right. As such, it's very difficult to pick the best game in the franchise.

In fact, because they're consistently good, we're going to cop out and put the entire series in at number 13. We will say that *Fire Pro* does take some work to get to grips with. They might not be easily accessible to newcomers, or boast the licensed superstars, but they're very comprehensive, boasting over 100 characters and 1,000+ moves. And, if you bother to give them a play, you'll soon realise that they succeed in putting every other wrestling franchise to shame. If you're a wrestling fan, you really owe it to yourself to get hold of a few of these games and rub them on your face, and if you want to really sample their brilliance put them in a console and hit the on button.

"The Last Blade's gameplay matches its aesthetics and it effectively plays like a far better balanced version of the Shodown series"





Marvel Vs Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes

■ **Year:** 2000

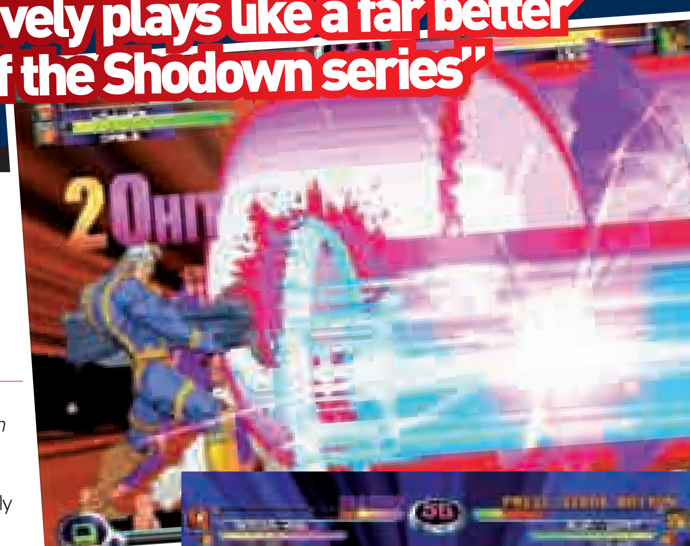
■ **Publisher:** Capcom

14

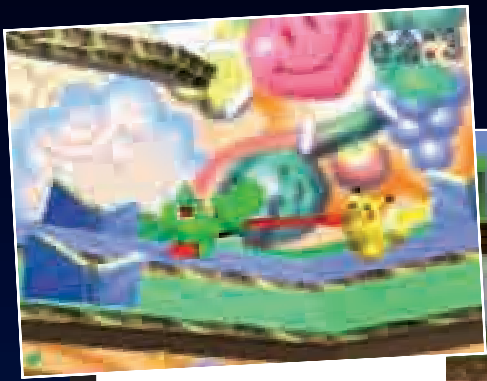
For the same reasons that the *Super Smash Bros* series holds such mass appeal among gamers, *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* would give us the chance to realise our nerdish, and probably highly unhealthy, fantasies of watching Spider-Man tie up Chun-Li and Mega Man beat up Jill Valentine.

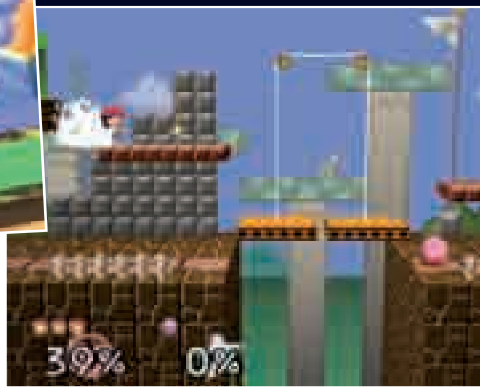
Despite the notable lack of those brilliantly surreal endings that appeared in the first game – Chun-Li joining the X-Men, Ryu getting killed at the hands of Omega Red – the sequel added more characters and ironed out a few of the niggles and criticisms that players had with the first game. The tagging system became more governing, the graphics more refined – thanks to it running from Sega's NAOMI hardware – and the game just felt a lot more accessible for newcomers.

Due to a small print run, the PS2 and Xbox versions of the game will set you back quite a few notes. The DC port, however, as you might expect, offers the most faithful representation of the arcade game and is a little easier and cheaper to come by.









Super Smash Bros

Year: 1999

Publisher: Nintendo

11

Given Nintendo's family-friendly image, it should come as absolutely no surprise that it would be responsible for giving us the ickiest, most sycophantic fighting game the world had ever seen.

Yes, pitting its well-known IPs together to duke it out inside wonderfully vivid stages themed around various Nintendo games was a no-brainer for success. Boasting a colossal 26 characters, plus plenty of mini-games to work through, Nintendo had certainly put a tremendous amount of effort in to ensure *Super Smash Bros* held a lot of longevity.

Nintendo would predictably baulk at the idea of allowing gamers to smash the chipper out of its heroic superstars that it'd worked so hard to create, by coquettishly wussing out and saying they were cuddly toys and adopting a clean stance on the fighting – a win was achieved by wearing your opponent down so much that you could smash them out of the ring and watch them disappear into the sky like an excitable helium balloon.

The greatest thing about *Super Smash Bros* is just how accessible it is. With many of the attacks performed using a combination of one button and a stick turn, the game would be easy to pick up for all ages, creating a videogame first: a fighting game that an old granny and a three-month-old baby could easily thrash it out to.

The Last Blade

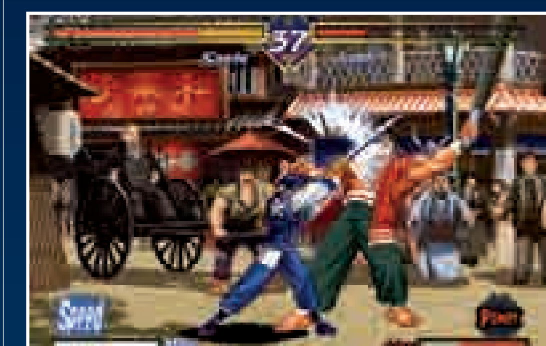
Year: 1997

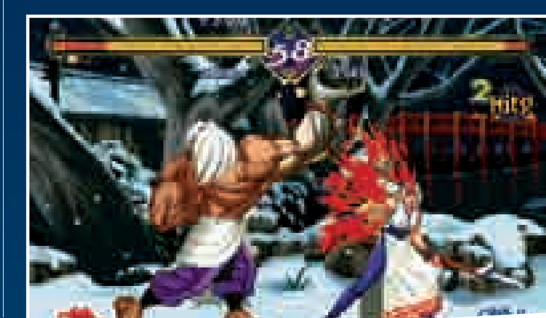
Publisher: SNK

10

There have been some stunning fighters produced over the years, but few of them can match the sheer beauty and elegance of *The Last Blade*. With its bold, gorgeously animated fighters and staggeringly detailed backgrounds, SNK's short-lived franchise (only three games currently exist) set a standard that few other brawlers have ever been able to match and it still looks amazing nearly a decade after its original release. Audio is also exceptional and while the music is of an incredibly high standard, it's the sound effects that really impress here. Every single animation, whether it's the shuffling of someone's feet or the swish of a heavy blade, is captured perfectly, with special mention going to the stages that forego music completely, just so you can hear those meticulous effects.

Fortunately, *Last Blade*'s gameplay matches its aesthetics and it effectively plays like a far better balanced version of the *Shodown* series. It uses a similar 'slash' and 'power' styling, but combos are far more effective, characters more evenly matched and there's even an excellent parry system that further expands on the already deep gameplay. An essential beat-'em-up that needs to be experienced by everyone.







Virtual On

Year: 1995

Publisher: Sega

12

A third-cum-first-person arcade game with giant robots armed with laser swords and guns. A controversial addition this one, it's certainly got the right ingredients to put a few fighting fan's noses out of joint. But the fact of the matter is this: *Virtual On* proved that robot wars could actually be enjoyable.

Slaying the demons of Capcom's sluggish (and not intentional, we suspect) *Cyberbots* and that mechanised PSone drivel *Krazy Ivan*, *Virtual On* simply proved that the idea could work. Admittedly, the battles weren't particularly close range, but the dual joystick controls were simple enough and the unusual kiss-chase approach meant the fights felt brilliantly innovative. This would be pivotal to the game's charm. The battles played out at a blistering pace, so the ducking and diving really added a sense of tension to the game.

Also, kudos to Sega for fusing the game with an imaginative narrative – you weren't actually playing an arcade game it transpired, but an elaborate machine sent from the future to seek potential *Virtual On* pilots – and enlisting the giant-robot design talents of fabled *Gundam* designer Hajime Katoki.







Top 25 Beat-'Em-Ups



Tekken 3

Year: 1996

Publisher: Namco

9

The highly anticipated third instalment in the popular Namco fighting franchise, to put a rather blunt point on it, is also the best (and yes, that includes recent PS3 offerings).

Maybe it had something to do with it being the last *Tekken* to bless its maternal console, but Namco would build on the brilliance of *Tekken 2* and deliver a sequel with more modes, more characters and more 'you wouldn't believe it unless you saw it running' visuals that many had never thought possible on the PlayStation.

The game would be heavily criticised at the time for being a brilliant 'button masher', whereby new players could quite effectively pull off a string of spectacular moves by brainlessly smashing their face down on the controller (this is most noticeable using Eddy Gordo). However, by introducing the brilliant *Virtua Fighter 2* sidestep, and brilliantly addictive mini-games – such as the beach volleyball and the *Final Fight*-style brawler Tekken Force – true *Tekken* aficionados would not be put off by such criticism, and would see *Tekken 3* for the brilliance that it unquestionably possessed.







King Of Fighters '98: The Slugfest

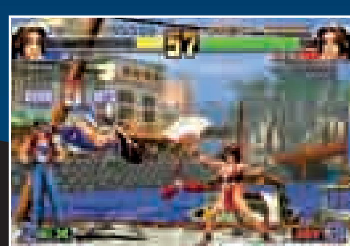
Year: 1998

Publisher: SNK

8

The SNK hardcore will argue that several *King Of Fighters* games should grace our top ten, but we've decided to go with one – *King Of Fighters '98: The Slugfest.* Worry not though, for this isn't a game about warring gastropods, but a dream match – incidentally the name of the later Dreamcast conversion – that pitches a selection of the very best SNK fighters against each other. With 38 initial fighters to choose from (and more that can be unlocked), *The Slugfest* offers a huge array of pugilists to choose from and while they are grouped together in their specific teams, you're able to pick whichever three combatants you wish.

You could argue that the overall sheen is cheapened due to SNK reusing many of the backgrounds and sprites from previous games in the series, but why the hell shouldn't it when they look so damn good in the first place. *The Slugfest* is a love letter to fans of the series and a stunning fighter in its own right. If you only ever purchase one game in the franchise then this is the one to go for.





Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior

Year: 1987

Publisher: Epyx

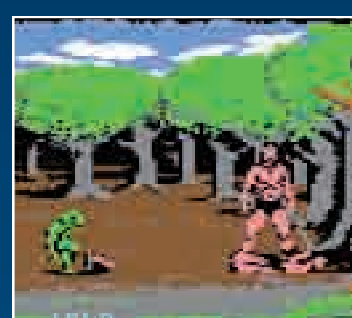
7

Despite being very much 'a game of the time' piggybacking off of Conan's muscular neck muscles, *Barbarian* is a game that has easily stood the test of time. It's a game that essentially has it all – character, realism, sublime animation, brutality, breasts and accessible controls, oh, and it also has decapitations and head punting.

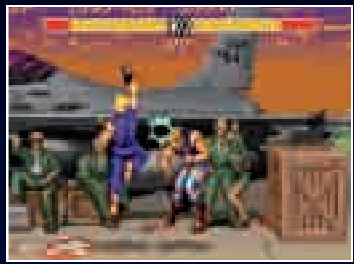
If you want to know where the real brilliance of *Barbarian* can be found, you have to look at the sporadic scales a victory rested on. Despite hacking and sapping five of your red health circles, your opponent, at any point, could still pull out a timely head-from-neck separator and claim a win.

Yes, the swishing 'web of death' might have made your warrior look like a hairy majorette, but it was the swirling decapitation that was the most satisfying move in the game (perhaps in any fighting game ever to be fair). It was laughably easy to pull off too, and it never became tiring. Also, the gamble of using it and leaving yourself open for attack was genuinely exhilarating. In *Barbarian* every move you made could potentially be your last. Now how many games on this list can boast that kind of realism? Alright, who said *Bushido Blade?*









Street Fighter II Turbo

Year: 1993

Publisher: Capcom

This brilliant tweaking of *Street Fighter II* would give Capcom two succulent bites of a plastic SNES apple. If we're completely honest, retailing at full asking price, and with us hearing of the odd horror story regaling tales about miserly importers demanding £100 for early copies of the game, *Street Fighter II Turbo*, released less than a year after *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, certainly seemed an extortionate little re-imagining.

But when Capcom finally handed us the keys to the game's speed – allowing for some truly chaotic spats – and its four iconic boss characters, it would take only a matter of minutes for the brilliance of this update to really shine through.

Other notable tweaks included characters and background stages being given a secondary colour palette – letting you and a pal batter each other with the same player – and the fighters also boasted refined and increased attacks.



Street Fighter II simply revolutionised and defined the one-on-one brawler, and every beat-'em-up released since owes it a debt of gratitude. If you need us to tell you why *SFII* is ace, there's no hope for you!

Soul Calibur

Year: 1999

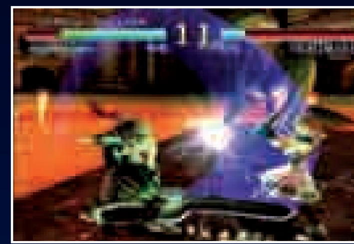
Publisher: Namco

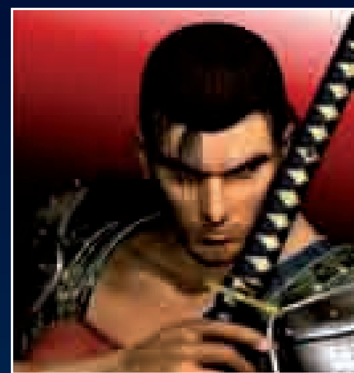
Thanks to it sharing a few body parts with its arcade cousin NAOMI, the DC boasted some great arcade ports in its short life. In a cruel twist though, it would be Sega's rivals Namco that would deliver the finest arcade conversion to appear on the machine.

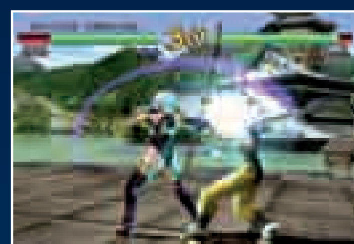
It looked far better than the System 12 arcade counterpart that it was trying to replicate – proof that Sega had sought to right previous wrongs and produce a console that was both powerful and user-friendly for developers.

If you boot *Soul Calibur* up today you'll notice it's lost none of its edge. A huge reinvention by Namco of the *Soul Edge* franchise, and a team-up with Sega ensured that where *Soul Calibur* had fared glumly in arcades the game would not suffer the same fate on the DC.

Perhaps it's for that reason, this coming together of Namco and Sega, why many gamers consider *Soul Calibur* to be the pinnacle of the fighting genre. Us, we think it's exceptional, but given as this is number five on our list, we obviously believe there are four better.







IK+

Year: 1987

Publisher: System 3

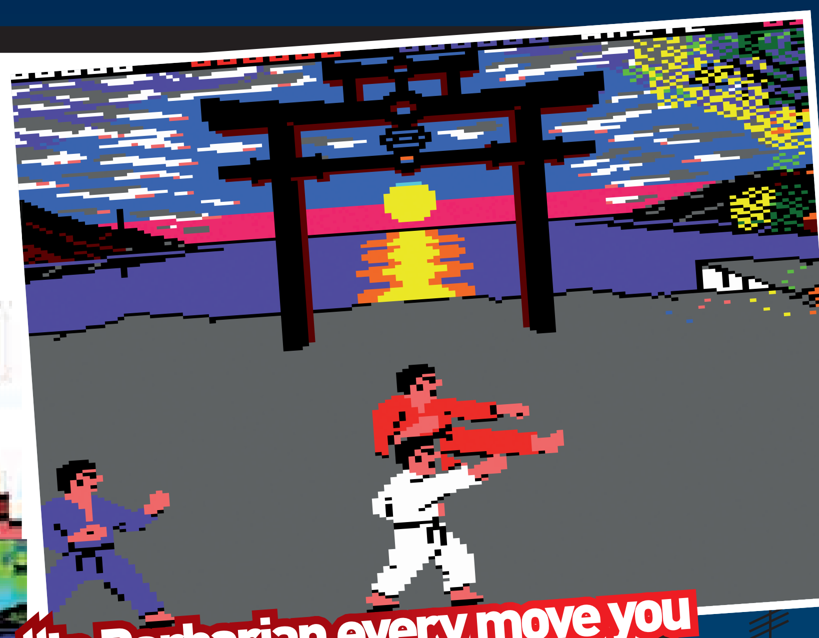
We're, of course, going to ignore the CPC and pig's guff of a Spectrum port that it was wholesaled from, and concentrate solely on the brilliant Commodore 64 and Atari 800 conversions of Archer's violent beat-'em-up. *IK+* was the first fighting game to put a fist through every box. It was, and still is, immensely fluid, fast and controlled. Oh, and did we mention that it had a real belt of humour and realistic collision detection? Its brilliant sense of enthusiasm also assailed each fighter, making them very likeable, and not in a weird uncomfortable way either.

The final sucker punch would be the late ingenious multiplayer tweaking that would bring to the bouts an extra fighter, allowing two friends to duke it out outside Sydney Opera House and scare some Aussie toffs.

It also had some addictive little between-bout bonuses, including butting some bricks, and deflecting snooker balls, and the occasional severed head, with a plasterer's trowel, to earn yourself some additional points.







"In Barbarian every move you made could potentially be your last! How many games can boast that kind of realism?"

TOP 25 BEAT-'EM UPS



Garou: Mark Of The Wolves

Year: 1999

Publisher: SNK

3

SNK has been responsible for some tremendous fighters over the years, but this stunning revitalisation of its *Fatal Fury* series is easily its finest hour.

Polished to utter perfection and featuring one of the most balanced character rosters around, it's effectively SNK's answer to Capcom's *Street Fighter III* series and shares many startling similarities. The most obvious being that the fighter's roster has been completely overhauled, with only original *Fatal Fury* brawler Terry Bogard making an appearance in the final line-up.

SNK isn't stupid, however, and by making many of the new fighters the offspring or students of previous characters – it's set ten years after the death of Geese Howard – it enabled players to instantly identify with many of the new fighters thanks to their similarities to the previous heroes.

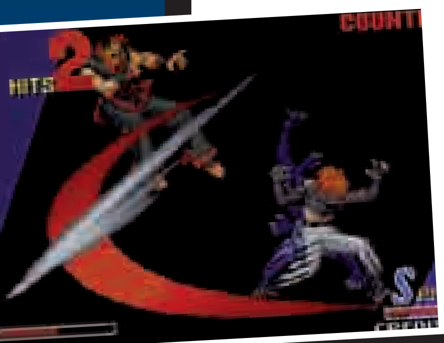
Then, of course, there's the Just Defend mechanic, which is effectively SNK's (safer) answer to *Street Fighter III*'s parrying system. The main difference here though is that it lacks the risk-and-reward factor that features so prominently in Capcom's classic brawler.

SNK added plenty of new mechanics – or expanded on older ones – with some of the most notable being Desperation Moves, Guard Cancels, Breaking techniques and the all-new TOP or Tactical Offence Position, as its more commonly known. You effectively set the TOP bar at a specific place on your energy bar and once a character's health enters that zone your attack power greatly increases, your energy gets slowly restored and you gain a brand new TOP attack.

What's most impressive about *Mark Of The Wolves* though is that it's just so damned deep. Despite being incredibly accessible to anyone with even a passing knowledge of an arcade beat-'em-up, *Garou*, like *Street Fighter III*, offers an insane amount of depth to anyone prepared to scratch below its gorgeous looking surface.

Backing up *Garou*'s sublime gameplay are some of the most polished visuals to appear in a 2D fighter, and certainly on the Neo-Geo. Featuring a similar style to the *Last Blade* series, Bogard and the rest of the combatants are beautifully animated and move with a grace and fluidity that few other beat-'em-ups can manage. The backgrounds, too, are a thing of wonder and boast some meticulous attention to detail.

It's not the easiest fighter to get hold of – AES copies go for over £300, while the Dreamcast and PS2 versions never made it to the UK – but if you're a beat-'em-up fan you should really try to track this game down.





Virtua Fighter 2

Year: 1996

Publisher: SNK

2

There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that Sega's perennial fighting franchise has offered us the most involved and layered fighting games ever created. And despite that number '2' sitting at the end of this game's title, the ethos and foundation for the series would really begin with *Virtua Fighter 2*, the second game in the franchise.

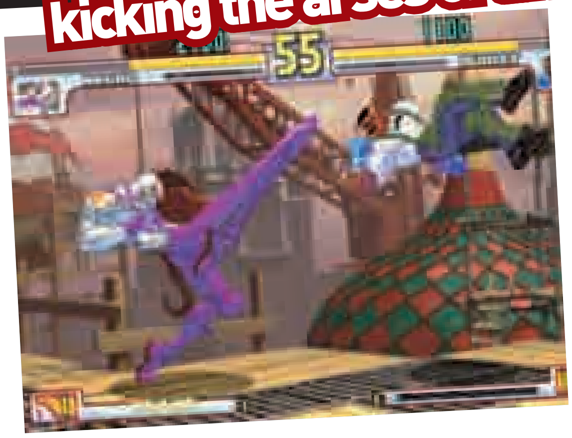
A shift from Sega's Model 1 to Model 2 arcade hardware allowed *Virtua Fighter*'s crude, polygonal fighters to become smoother, more burnished and a lot quicker. Taking its 1,000+ move list from real martial art techniques, texture mapping and animations via motion capture, Sega laid down a clearer foundation for the type of fighter that it was looking to create. Flashy special moves, blinding pyrotechnics and characters made from tree bark would clearly be out; in its place would be innovation, believability and a staggering amount of longevity (if you scratched at the game's surface).

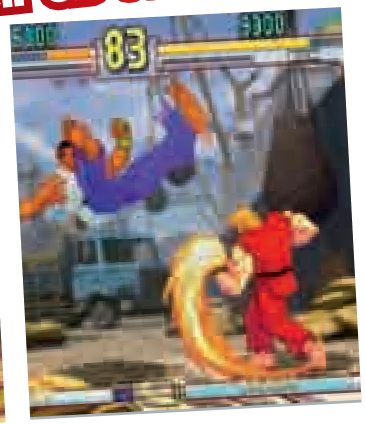
Sega would also add two new fighters to the original roster of ten (we're including the android-like Dural), with both boasting very individual fighting styles. The ageing Shun Di utilised the 'drunken master' technique, lulling opponents into a false sense of advantage he would lumber around the ring with a glazed expression, supping grog from his hip flask and snapping like a tormented python. For curtain-haired Lion Rafale a peculiar 'praying mantis' style of fighting – a mixture of sharp, snapping jab attacks and quick counters – was employed, making him practically invincible in the right hands.

Released alongside *Sega Rally*, *Virtua Fighter 2*'s home port of the game was a real tour de force for the Saturn, an exquisite example of the performance muscles that the console could quite easily flex. And in the period when the 3D fighter was at its most prevalent, *Virtua Fighter 2* can stand tall as the very best that it ever got.



"3rd Strike is a phenomenal brawler that proved that 2D fighters were still more than capable of kicking the arses of their 3D counterparts"







Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike

- **Year:** 1999
- **Publisher:** Capcom

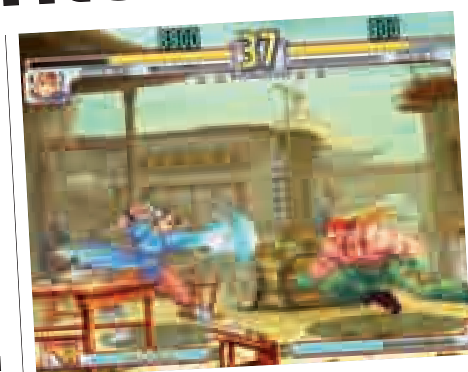
1

Oh come on? Considering how much we've praised Capcom's magnificent brawler in the past, did you really expect to see any other fighter in the number one spot?

Beautifully balanced – with the exception of cheap Ken – and with the sort of smooth, flowing animation that would have a catwalk model going green with envy, *3rd Strike* is a simply phenomenal brawler that not only marked a bold change in direction for Capcom, but also proved that 2D fighters were still more than capable of kicking the arses of their 3D counterparts.

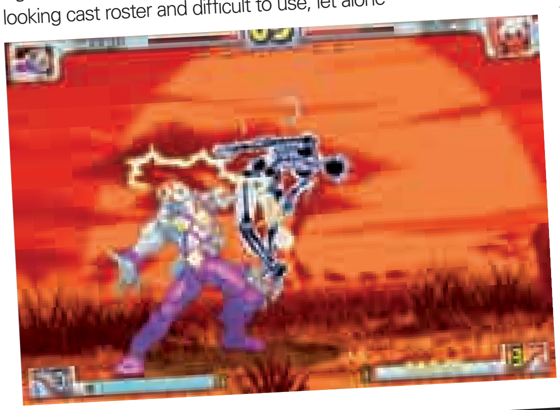
Yes, it took Capcom nearly two years and three attempts to finally get it right – *Street Fighter III: New Generation* appeared in February 1997, *2nd Impact* was released in September of the same year, while *3rd Strike* was released in Japanese arcades in May 1999 – and yes, many were disappointed that so few recognisable characters appeared (only Ryu, Ken, Akuma and Chun-Li made the cut), but once you actually started playing it you soon realised what made it so very special.

It's certainly not as accessible as past *Street Fighter* games – mainly due to the almost alien-looking cast roster and difficult to use, let alone master, parrying system – but perseverance brings its own rewards and you soon uncover the sheen that lurks beneath Capcom's glossy looking fighter. Indeed, it's the parry system that is *3rd Strike*'s biggest triumph. SNK may well have copied *Street Fighter III*'s parrying system and used it to great effect in *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, but Capcom's version is the far better mechanic, simply because it offers an amazing sense of risk and reward that's missing from every other fighter in the genre.



Mess up a parry in *Garou* and, because you're holding back to block anyway, you're never actually punished for getting your timing wrong. Try the same move in *3rd Strike*, however, and because you're pushing forward, you'll be brutally punished, as you're completely left open to a counterattack from your opponent. It's certainly hard to pull off, but there's nothing more satisfying than when you are finally able to counter Ken's Dragon Punch and respond with a devastating attack of your own.

Granted, there's the same three-kick, three-punch button combination that has been with the series since *Street Fighter II*, but *3rd Strike* upped the ante by allowing you to do special taunts and grabs that aren't initially apparent to the unschooled. Therefore, like *Garou* and *Virtua Fighter 2*, skilled players will soon be able to pull off the sort of outrageous attacks and combos that a novice player wouldn't be capable of, or even be able to fully comprehend for that matter. Indeed, you only have to witness Diego's stunning parrying performance at the 2003 EVO tournament (www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKWEG91P5e4) to realise that *3rd Strike* holds an incredible amount of scope for those dedicated players who are prepared to uncover its many secrets.



This is also true for the 20 available characters (final boss Gill is only playable in the various console versions). Initially, many of them come off as poorly thought-out variations of previous characters; Dudley appears to be a second rate Balrog, Necro plays like a cross between Dhalsim and Blanka, while Hugo and Alex appear to be standing in for Zangief, but again, these first appearances are misleading. Each and every one of the 15 new fighters are not only wonderfully unique – special mention to the leggy Elena whose attacks are limited to a variety of devastating kicks – but also meticulously balanced. And while some are predictably weaker than others, they're all turned into lethal killing machines in the hands of a skilled player.

With its sublime animation, excellent character roster and rich and varied gameplay, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* more than deserves the praise that we constantly heap upon it.



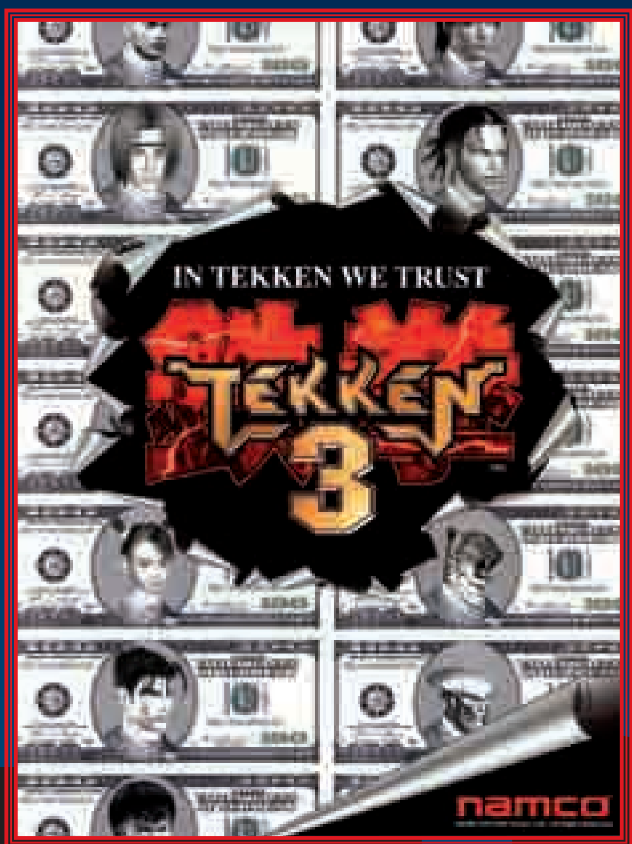
TOP 25 BEAT-EM-UPS



The Last Blade Year Released: 1997



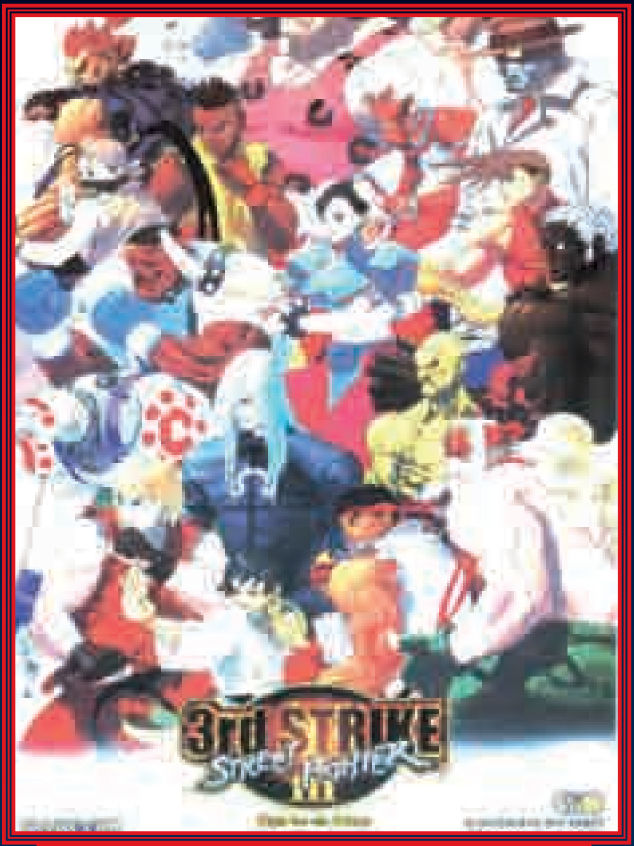
Garou: Mark Of The Wolves Year Released: 1999



Tekken 3 Year Released: 1996



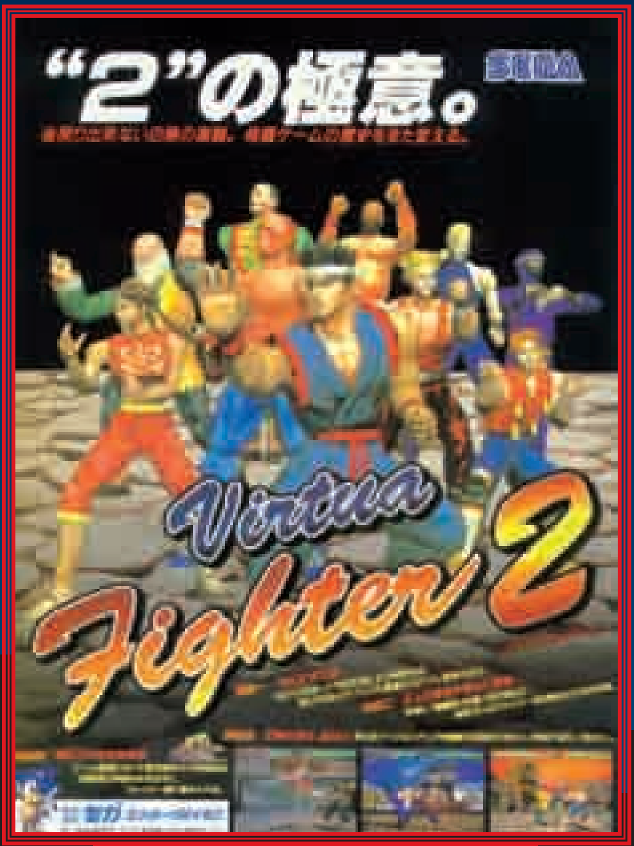
The King Of Fighters '98: The Slugfest Year Released: 1998



Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike Year Released: 1999



Soul Calibur Year Released: 1998



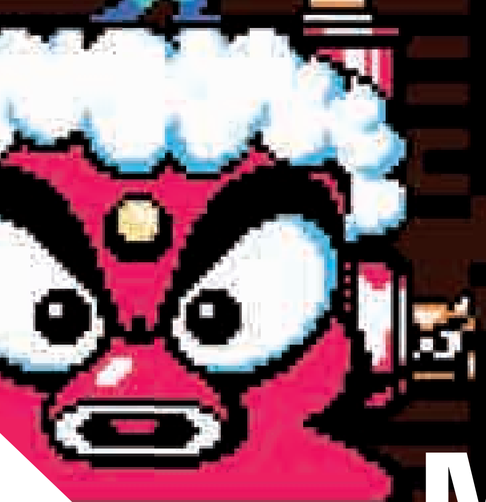
Virtua Fighter 2 Year Released: 1995



Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior Year Released: 1987

THE CLASSIC GAME





When evil scientist Dr Wily plots to take over the world using an army of colourful robots, there's only one man blue and mega enough to put a stop to his nefarious plan. Stuart Hunt pops on a blue bike helmet, dusts off his beloved NES and boots up Mega Man 2.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



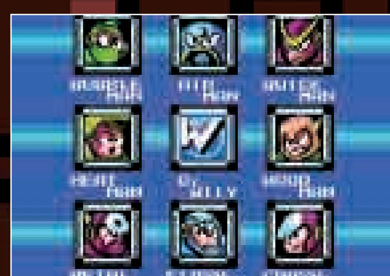
Mega Man – he's an invention, built from machine parts by an old guy in a laboratory. He's the videogame equivalent of Pinocchio, but with the difference being that the puppet's rubbish in comparison to Capcom's titular hero. Why? Because the dummy is wooden, has a nose that prevents him from cheating on his marionette girlfriend and has a cockney, top-hat-wearing cricket for a friend. Now Mega Man, on the other hand, is a cool shade of ice-blue with overtly chunky shins, has a laser cannon where a hand lives, and boasts so much bravado he somehow manages to persuade a robotic dog to be his friend. He also goes by more than one name (Rockman, in Japan) and shifted shedloads of NES cartridges on his first videogame outing, despite them being wrapped in an artwork that baulked at his boyish demeanour and then re-imaged him as a 40-year-old virgin wearing a yellow tracksuit and looking mildly derivative with a handgun.

Since then, it's safe to say all has not been well in Mega Man's world. The motherboard hit the fan in 200X, while Megs was standing aloft a skyscraper one starry night. Was he going to jump and end it there… who can tell? Well, after the arduous mission that was *Mega Man*, perhaps the prospect of being recalled to one day face off against frustratingly hard-going gameplay and practically impossible bosses had taken its emotional toll. But then he hears a rumbling from an army of new robot nastiness forged by his old foe and megalomaniac old duffer, Dr Wily, and a new contract is rather hastily drawn up. The agreement is that Mega Man will return if Capcom agrees to include some kind of save system into the game and someone who has an actual vested interest in videogames gets to design the game's boxart.

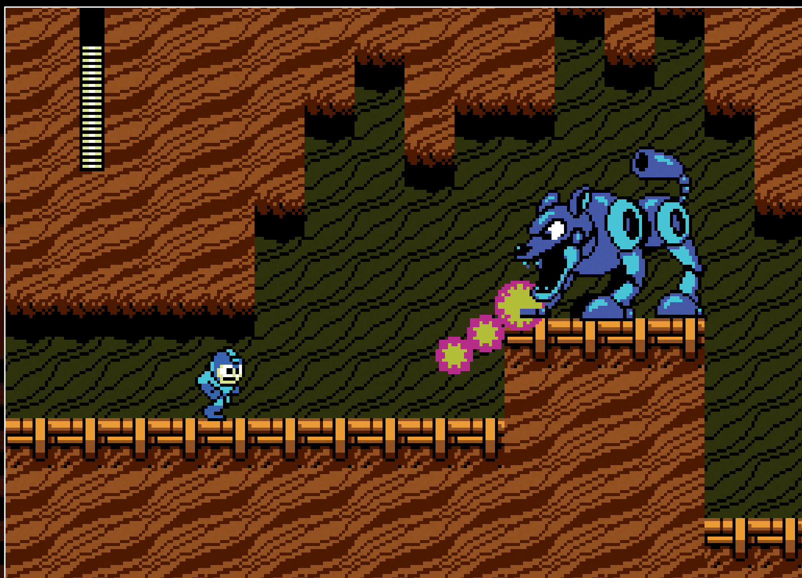
As notoriously attractive as it was notoriously arduous, Mega Man's second outing had the remarkable ability of being both really frustrating and really appeasing at exactly the same moment in time. This bemusing feeling came by it being brilliant to gawp at – with its chunky cartoon graphics, elaborate and varied characters and quirky themed levels – but also being an utter pig to complete. *Mega Man 2* is a run-'n'-gun-cum-platform puzzle game, and was a brilliant hotchpotch that worked fantastically as a showpiece of what the NES could achieve. It was also the *Mega*



» Bubble Man is one of the easiest bosses to kill, which probably has something to with the fact he opts to hit you with bubbles.



» Here's the boss roster. We would tell you the order in which you should tackle them, but it's been so long we've forgotten…



» Some of the midway enemies are actually bigger than the bosses themselves. Thankfully, they take fewer hits.



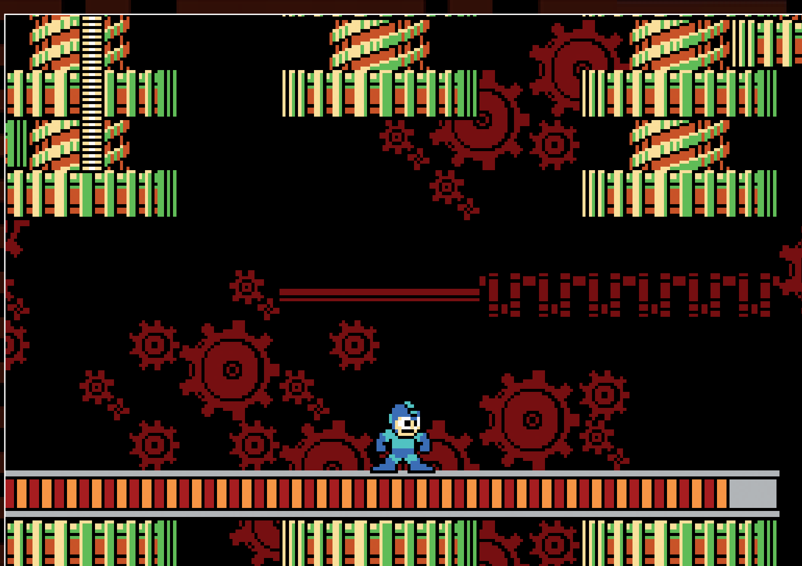
» Woodman's stage is one of the best-looking levels in the game.

Man title that launched the metal might into global stardom, paving the way for many messy offshoots and sequels inside the franchise.

For *Mega Man 2*, all the raw elements of the first game were wholesaled over. Mega Man still had the ability to pilfer the powers of bosses and that dastardly boss-rush section also made a re-emergence. Plus, the bosses and their masochistic stages all played significance to the structure of play, as vanquishing Woodman and his potent leaf powers would have garlic-to-a-vampire properties to one of his robotic comrades. This rather large oversight by a blinkered Wily meant that the order in which you tackled the whimsically themed stages of *Mega Man 2* was quite significant in helping you prise open its heavy door of progression. On its release, however, some gamers lamented (and they do have a valid point) that, due to the sporadic themes of the bosses, this cross-referencing involved far too much trial and error and little rhyme or reason.

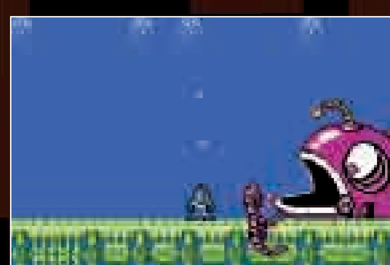
Mega Man 2 was also a bigger game than the first, and added two extra robotic bosses to the original's roster of six (with eight then becoming the numerical stay-in for *3* and *4*, etc). And after you've pilfered the abilities from all of the cybernetic foes in the game, it still grows in size again, leaving Mega Man, now resting on his newly acquired platform-generating powers, to traverse Wily's lair for a final showdown with his arch nemesis.

Now, while it might seem strange for us to speak so negatively about a 'classic game', stupidly thorny gameplay has always been the essence of *Mega Man* titles. In fact, it became the bread and butter of the series. That aside, the game is widely regarded as the zenith of a highly popular and successful Capcom franchise. And while poor old Mega Man himself certainly doesn't get much love on our side of the water any more, he's still undoubtedly a national hero in his home country.



» Metal Man is a collector of oversized cogs. Regrettably.





» All of the stages are brilliantly themed, and look great.

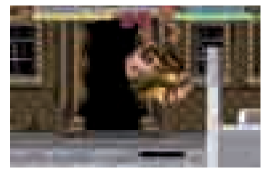
"MEGA MAN'S SECOND OUTING HAD THE REMARKABLE ABILITY OF BEING BOTH FRUSTRATING AND APPEASING AT EXACTLY THE SAME MOMENT IN TIME"

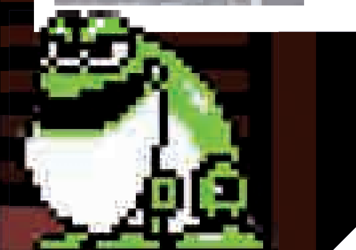
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RESIDENT EVIL
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, GAMECUBE, PC, SATURN
YEAR: 1996

STREET FIGHTER II
SYSTEM: TAKE YOUR PICK
YEAR: 1991

FINAL FIGHT 3 AKA FINAL FIGHT TOUGH (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1995





BETTER THE DEVIL, IF YOU KNOW HOW

If you think *Mega Man 2* was an onerous challenge, try revisiting the first game. Despite being the shortest of the six *Mega Man* games to appear on the NES, the first game is widely regarded as not only the most gruelling in the series but one of the most backbreaking videogames full stop. This was principally afforded to the fact that there was no save or password system. Another brick wall the player would hit was the ridiculously hard-going Yellow Devil (aka Rock Monster) boss, whose laborious attack routine and annoyingly high attack-ratio allowed for a large 'Game Over' window to open up. Wily gamers, however, cottoned on to a peculiar two-tiered pause option bug, which allowed multiple attacks on enemies, if timed right, and if used with a bit of flair could help topple the yellow blighter effortlessly.



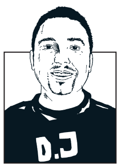


MARS MATRIX

PROVING IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS



- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 2000
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** DREAMCAST
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30



HISTORY

***Mars Matrix* is one of the ugliest shooters we've ever played. Set against a palette of dreary browns and blues, it's a truly miserable-looking blaster that lacks the sheer vibrancy and sheen that many other Dreamcast shooters are so famous for and just leaves you feeling rather empty inside. It's like the Seasonal Affective Disorder of videogames.**

Still, even though *Mars Matrix*'s appearance can inflict uninterested discord in even the hardest of hearts, it quickly comes alive once you get past its unattractive interior.

Similar in style to *Giga Wing* and *Giga Wing 2* (hardly surprising as they're all by the same developer), *Mars Matrix* not only features the same shield system – hold down the fire button to charge your shield and suck in nearby bullets that can then be spat out to cause damage – but also boasts a horizontally aligned screen. This is something *Radiant Silvergun, 1944: The Loop Master* and *Soukyugurentai* all share, and is surprisingly rare in vertical shooters.

Unforgivingly tough and requiring the sort of hyper-reactive reflexes that even Superman probably doesn't possess – we can't be really sure though as we've never seen him play it – *Mars Matrix* is as merciless as it is ugly and constantly pounds you with enemies, bullets, bullets and… well… even more bullets. Granted, clever juggling of your shield (it takes a while to recharge) will enable you to get through some of the thicker bullet clusters, but you're going to need an insane amount of skill if you ever plan to complete this puppy on a single credit.

Mars Matrix may well be lacking in the visuals department, but there's nothing at all wrong with its pounding, pulsating music. Plus Takumi also saw fit to include plenty of abrasive effects to ensure that every enemy's demise brought a satisfying ring to your ears.

Add in an exhaustive – and Dreamcast exclusive – shop that featured a ridiculous amount of unlockables and an incredibly satisfying two-player experience, and *Mars Matrix* proved that first looks can be very, very deceiving.


PRESS

THE MAKING OF...

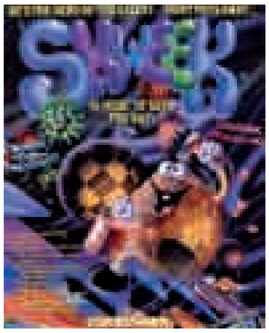
SKWEEK AND SUPER SKWEEK

When Skweek hit the Atari ST in 1989, its mix of classic gameplay elements split the audience, between those who loved its fun approach, and those who'd become immersed in more modern fare. Craig Grannell talks to Skweek's creative team, Laurent Arditi and Stéphane Ducasse, about the game's genesis





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** LORICIEL

» **DEVELOPER:** LAURENT ARDITI, STÉPHANE DUCASSE

» **RELEASED:** 1989–91

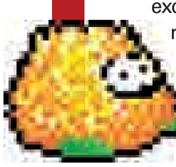
» **PLATFORMS:** SKWEEK: ATARI ST, AMIGA, CPC, GAME GEAR, DOS SUPER SKWEEK: ATARI ST, AMIGA, CPC, LYNX

» **GENRE:** ARCADE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** FROM £2

Having grown up on a diet of exciting Eighties arcade games, Laurent Arditi and Stéphane Ducasse became disheartened by the 16-bit gaming scene. Considering many games beautiful but boring, they craved the fun they'd experienced on their Amstrads, and decided that if no one else was going to create the kind of game they wanted to play, they'd go ahead and do it themselves. The result was *Skweek*, a mutant hybrid of *Pac-Man* and *Q*bert*, which finds you guiding an orange fuzzball around numerous tiled levels, flipping tiles to make them pink, all the while avoiding traps and shooting the various nasties that populate the surreal landscape.

It's a simple premise, but a fun, fast game, and although some British critics derided it at the time for being too simple or 'just for kids', (a notable exception being girly games reviewer Kati Hamza's glowing review in issue 24 of *ACE*, "It doesn't look or sound like anything special, but once you start playing you can't stop"), it's since come to be regarded as something of a lost gem.



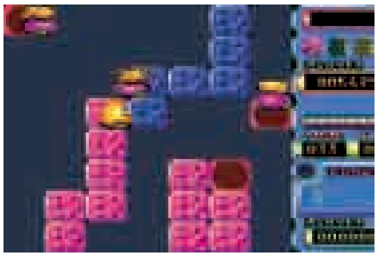
For a game that so unashamedly wears its arcade influences on its sleeve, it is hardly surprising to discover that both its creators were massive fans of frenetic arcade games that had a 'cute' edge – they cite *Bomb Jack*, *Bubble Bobble*, *Rainbow Islands*, *Boulder Dash* and *Chip's Challenge* as particular favourites. "Basically, anything that was well done and addictive," confirms Stéphane, who adds that the specific arcade game that got the *Skweek* ball rolling was found in his university's common room. "It was about a guy having to paint tiles, but I can't remember its name, and it definitely wasn't *Q*bert*," he remembers.

From a simple concept – "A game mixing action and reflection," according to Laurent; "A mixture of a shoot-'em-up and a tile game," states Stéphane – the game rapidly took shape, its creators largely working on instinct. "Developing a game requires spending a third of your time on its core, and the remainder on details, improvements and fine-tuning," claims Laurent. "The core in our game was to control Skweek on a scrolling grid, in order to paint the blue levels pink, and that was it – there was no project plan."

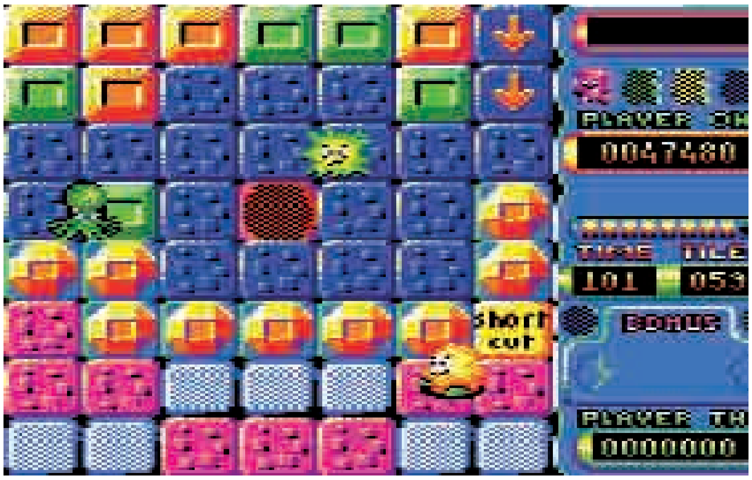
Step by step, improvements were made by adding new types of tiles,



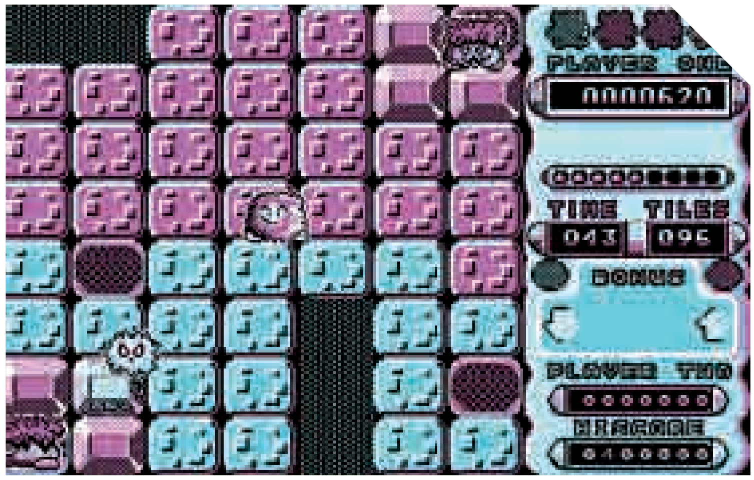
» **[Atari ST]** Skweek blunders into a late screen in the Atari ST version's genuinely helpful tutorial.



» **[Amstrad]** It was at times like these that Skweek wondered whether repainting his world was worth risking his life for.



» [Amstrad] See if you can spot the blatant fib in this sentence: We really like the flip-screen scrolling in the Amstrad conversion.



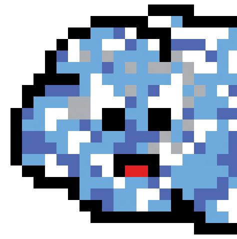
» [DOS] Argh – it burns! EGA-style *Skweek* fun. Luckily, the CGA version was less likely to make you claw your own eyes out.

monsters and bonuses. Laurent concentrated on programming, while Stéphane worked on crafting the visuals. "In general, Stéphane played the game and asked for improvements, which I was usually reluctant to accept," laughs Laurent. "And he regularly provided new graphics and animations that he urged me to integrate. As soon as possible, I'd release a new version, and another loop iteration started…"

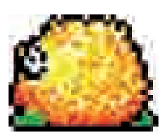
Although the pair started out with a basic tile game, it was soon clear that *Skweek* was veering towards a *Boulder Dash*-style mix of frenetic, arcade-based action and more thoughtful puzzle elements, and Laurent claims that it was always the pair's goal to create a game that crossed genres. "The thing is, the game was not technically good enough to be a pure arcade game anyway," Laurent claims. "It would have required faster scrolling, more sprites, and so on. Also, we wanted to mix levels, with some being arcade-oriented, and others being puzzles."

While the pair were unconcerned with their game fitting within the neatly defined pigeonholes increasingly evident within the market, aspects of existing titles did force their hand. "We focused on making the game playable, with the joystick controlling the character in a smooth fashion," explains Laurent. He says there were things the pair found annoying in other games, and they were determined such shortcomings wouldn't affect *Skweek*. As an example, he notes how if Skweek runs along a wall, he isn't automatically stopped – a diagonal on the joystick means he'll keep moving. More usefully, if he's close to a corner of a wall, Skweek will automatically slide away to avoid it. "Another example is when Skweek dies," explains Laurent. "Most games force you back to the start of the level or re-spawn you where you died, and each choice may be advantageous, depending on the situation. When Skweek dies, he reappears at the same place by default. But if you press the fire button at that time, he reappears at the start of the level. Small details like that actually make a big difference to the game."

Laurent wasn't alone when it came to attention to detail. During the project, Stéphane was hard at work, creating a unified visual concept for the game, at odds with the popular futuristic stylings evident in the likes of Bitmap Brothers productions. "We wanted something with flashy colours and a Japanese style," says Laurent. The aim was to ensure the characters weren't aggressive, partly in an attempt to snare female gamers. This proved instrumental in getting the game published, as Laurent reveals, "When Loriciel received our prototype, they didn't pay it much attention. But the administrators, who were mostly women, started playing it during breaks, and so the bosses realised it might be worth publishing."



For Stéphane, *Skweek* proved a challenge. Not a graphic artist by trade, he drew on a love of comics for inspiration, and learned from other games how to push pixels and play with light. "I had no animation tools at all, though, so I'd draw sprites, run to Laurent's place, and beg him to extract and animate them, so I could see the results," remembers Stéphane. "Sometimes I was terribly disappointed."



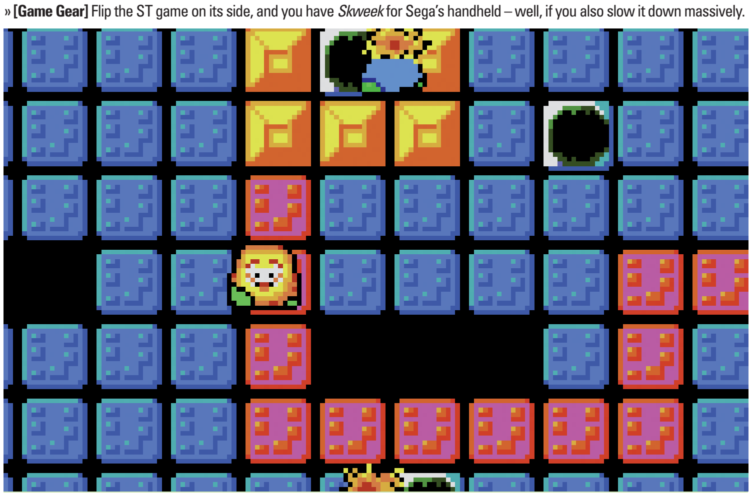
"IT WASN'T GOOD ENOUGH TO BE A PURE ARCADE GAME. IT NEEDED FASTER SCROLLING AND MORE SPRITES. WE WANTED SOME ARCADE-ORIENTED LEVELS, AND SOME PUZZLES" LAURENT ARDITI





» The *Skweek* team still get emails from people asking for replacement disks. Have these people not heard of eBay?

» [Game Gear] Flip the ST game on its side, and you have *Skweek* for Sega's handheld – well, if you also slow it down massively.



» [PC-Engine] This is as far as we got on the vomit-inducing PC-Engine version before we had to make a dash to the toilet.



THE MAKING OF...

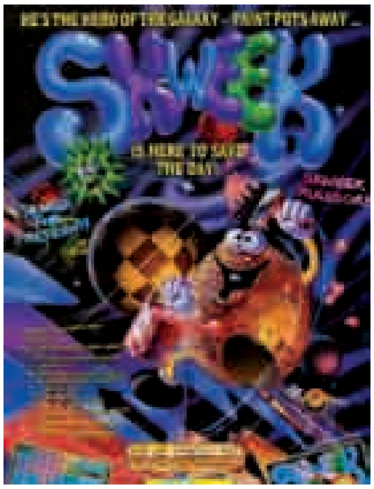
SKWEEK AND SUPER SKWEEK



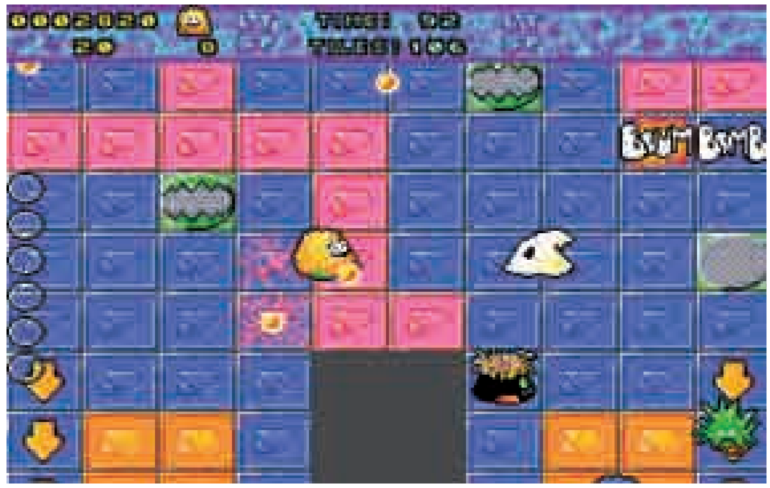
TINY SKWEEKS

Eager to capitalise on the *Skweek* brand, which had become one of its best-known and most popular properties, Loriciel surprisingly went ahead with a third game in the series without the involvement of *Skweek*'s creative team. In stark contrast to previous *Skweek* games, *The Tiny Skweeks* dispensed with the fast-paced action, particularly evident in *Super Skweek*, instead focusing solely on puzzles. The result is a game akin to sliding tile-based puzzlers, with more than a little influence from *Soko-Ban*. You're tasked with moving the coloured Tiny Skweeks (who don't stop until they hit another object) to like-coloured circular tiles. While reasonably entertaining in the short term, *Tiny Skweeks* offers practically no challenge during its initial 20 or so stages, and the biggest drawback of the format is that it lacks the one thing that made *Skweek*, and especially *Super Skweek*, so appealing: a sense of fun.





» The advertisement for *Skweek* was certainly bright.



»[Atari ST] *Super Skweek*'s approach is faster and more violent than its predecessor's – well, as violent as cute monsters can be.

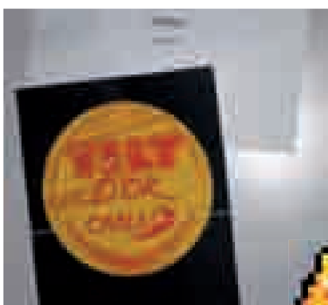
Despite having been designed on the Atari ST, *Skweek* made its way to other platforms. Laurent and Stéphane dealt with the practically identical Amiga version – "It was done in a hurry, and is a basic port that doesn't exploit the superiority of the Amiga," admits Laurent – while others converted the game to DOS, Amstrad, Game Gear and the PC-Engine. "We had little say in those conversions, especially the ones done in Japan," explains Laurent. "The CPC one was okay, considering the limitations of the machine, but the game was horrible on PC, and the Game Gear and PC-Engine efforts lack the playability of the 16-bit versions. Unfortunately, we couldn't review the ports before they were released…"

"I HAD NO ANIMATION TOOLS AT ALL, SO I'D DRAW SPRITES, RUN TO LAURENT'S PLACE, AND BEG HIM TO EXTRACT AND ANIMATE THEM, SO I COULD SEE THE RESULTS" STÉPHANE DUCASSE

Although it's fair to say *Skweek* didn't set the world alight, it did enough to gain a fiercely loyal following, and perhaps with the boost of attaining the coveted Tilt d'Or (France's top videogaming prize) for best action game, a sequel was put into production. The result was *Super Skweek,* a faster game with more depth and, one suspects, features Laurent and Stéphane would have liked to have added to the first game, if they'd only had the time.

At a glance, the Atari ST version looks little different to its predecessor: you're still using your orange fuzzball to paint levels pink, avoid traps and shoot adversaries. Upon playing the game, though, it soon becomes clear that it's not only been fine-tuned – the game 'feels' a lot better than *Skweek* – but also that numerous features have been added. "There were, in fact, only two requirements for *Super Skweek*: we had to keep the same character and retain his primary mission of painting tiles pink," says Laurent. "The rest was up to us, and so we added many features that we missed from *Skweek*: a two-player mode, new monsters, bonuses, loads of new weapons, money and a shop, along with many more levels." Visually, the game was also superior, with tighter animation and definition, and some amusing cartoon-like scenes prior to each level. Stéphane puts these improvements, in part, down to Laurent creating for him a simple animation tool, so he could work on animations independently, fine-tuning them before they were added to the game.

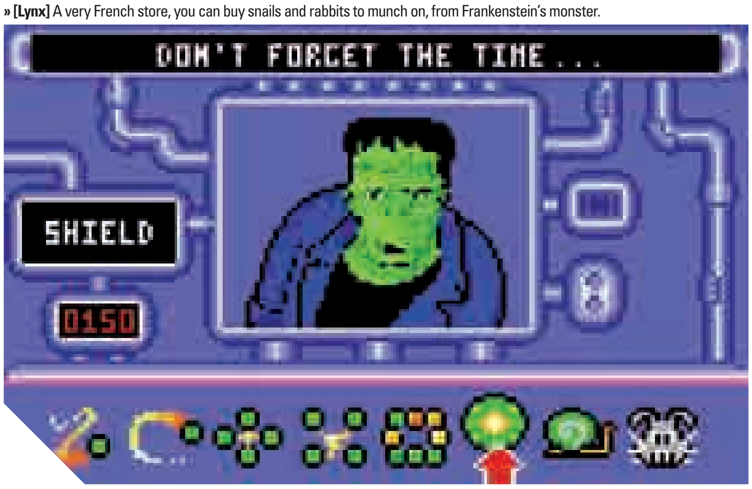
However, arguably the biggest change with *Super Skweek* was that it



» *Skweek* snagged France's prestigious Tilt d'Or, beating *Rick Dangerous* to the punch. Score one for the fuzzy orange guy!



» [Lynx] A very French store, you can buy snails and rabbits to munch on, from Frankenstein's monster.



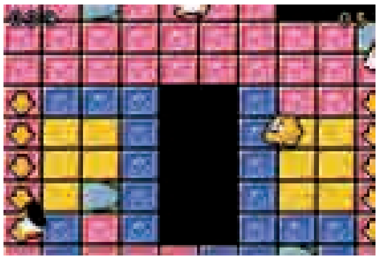
» [Atari ST] For a guy whose species can build UFOs, you wonder why *Skweek* gets all hands-on with repainting his world.





» [ST] *Super Skweek* requires you to work on two levels, the subtle 'UP' squares flinging you skywards.

finally spawned a successful console version, this time for the Lynx. "For *Skweek*, Loriciel sold licences for Game Gear and PC-Engine versions, but with many intermediates involved, we got very few royalties. So when Loriciel got a contract to develop *Super Skweek* on the Lynx, we insisted that we should do it," says Laurent. "The game was the perfect match for the console, and it was great developing for the Lynx. I loved the simplicity of the 6502 processor, and the power of the graphics hardware. We improved the game, tailoring it for the smaller screen, and taking advantage of the hardware, such as using zoom effects on some of the screens."



» [Lynx] We wrote this caption instead of Craig so it's not funny.

For Stéphane, the Lynx version of *Super Skweek* was the undisputed high point of the series. "The game was richer, and we got to add lots of extra things, such as the large ice creams falling from the sky that you had to run to catch, and the balloons to shoot to get extra lives," he says. Some gamers were less enamoured, claiming the sequel lacked the simplicity of *Skweek*, but Laurent remains unrepentant, "If you enjoyed and completed *Skweek*, you can only love *Super Skweek*, because it's *Skweek* plus many extra things."

Despite the relative success of both *Skweek* titles, its creators vanished from the games industry soon after *Super Skweek*'s release, through a combination of demoralisation and sheer bad luck. The pair had started work on a table-tennis game, with then-rare digitised graphics and audio, along with real-world physics, for Loriciel (who'd already exploited the *Skweek* property with the iffy *The Tiny Skweeks*, which had zero input from the original team – see the 'Tiny Skweeks' boxout), but the French publisher's bankruptcy took with it any chance of the game's completion, along



» A development cart for *Super Skweek* on the Lynx. If your shop-bought one looks like this, we suggest you return it.

with any potential income from the Lynx version of *Super Skweek*. After that point, Laurent and Stéphane followed a path more closely related to their studies, concentrating on complex programming and engineering.

However, the question of whether the orange protagonist could one day make a return is met with enthusiasm. The pair mention their Skweek Strikes Back website (www.iam.unibe.ch/~ducasse/skweek2.htm), effectively a calling card to current publishers, and have various ideas of how a new *Skweek* game might work. "I think *Super Skweek* would be a great game on smartphones and handheld consoles, perhaps using the Lynx version as a starting point," offers Laurent, admitting that opportunities are more limited elsewhere, due to "games now being more like movies, with very nice animation, but relatively little playing, which is contrary to what *Skweek* is." Stéphane agrees, noting that the game was originally designed with consoles in mind anyway. "If the PC-Engine version had been better, it could have been a big hit on other consoles," he suggests. Perhaps if the right publisher happens across the pair's website, it still could be.



ATARI MEMORIES

Laurent reveals that developing *Super Skweek* for Lynx proved the biggest challenge of the *Skweek* games. Atari's requirements were more demanding than Loriciel's, and a 'hidden' *Tetris* was swiftly removed from the near-complete game, due to legal reasons. "Also, there was some strange 'political correctness' going on," remembers Laurent. "One monster was a black skull, but Atari thought that might offend people, and so we had to make it red!"

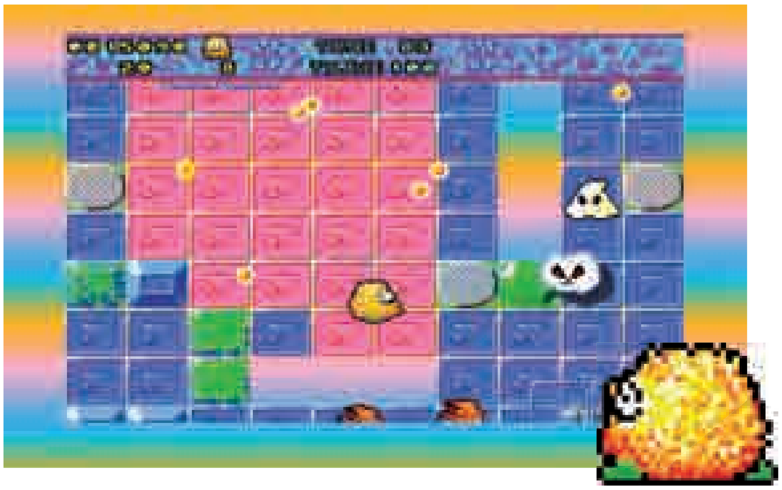
The hardware's limitations also proved tricky to overcome, with Laurent using various technical tricks to shoehorn in more colours, and dynamically load, decompress and execute blocks of code. "I remember the night before we had to finish the final version," says Laurent. "After compiling the code, it was six bytes too large to fit on the cartridge, and so we thought for a bit, changed one colour in one of the sprites, and the final game ended up exactly six bytes smaller!"



» [Lynx] Cartoon mayhem and death: Skweek shows off his firepower in the sequel.



» [ST] *Super Skweek* on the ST has a 'rainbow'-disabling option that could be dubbed the 'don't make me lose my lunch' option.



A role-playing dynasty –

The History of Might And Magic

We are all well aware of such long-standing series as the Marios, Donkey Kongs and Final Fantasies of this world. But there is another gaming great that has been around for a good two decades, through a nine-volume original series, a slew of spin-offs on every major platform, and which also launched a turn-based strategy series that is now in its fifth outing. Join us now, as Craig Ritchie takes us back on a look through 20 years of Might And Magic



The mid-Eighties computer role-playing landscape was dominated by industry big dogs *Ultima* and *Wizardry*. SSI published *Phantasie* and *Questron*, *The Bard's Tale* was soon to gain popularity, and RPGs were making good headway into the slowly growing computer-gaming market. It was around this time that a young man named Jon Van Caneghem, his supportive family behind him, was hard at work on a project he called *Might And Magic: Secrets Of The Inner Sanctum*.

Despite minimal funding, which was nothing unusual for independent computer game developers of the time, Van Caneghem dedicated almost three years to the game, working out of his home in Hollywood, California, and was fortunate enough to put together a talented team that would help bring his game to life. "As I recall Jon was very easy going – he had some type of arrangement, I believe, with his family as far as living arrangements or support that allowed him to pursue his vision," says Joe Ferreira, who was responsible for *Might And Magic I*'s artwork. Ferreira was no stranger to fantasy design, having worked on products for such well-known brands as *Star Trek*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe*.

"I met Jon through the project's art director, Mary Ellen Bloom," he adds. "Mary Ellen was a freelance designer I had parcelled work out to on many girl's brands when I was in-house art director for Mattel Toys. She returned the favour when I went out on my own. Mary Ellen was responsible for the excellent packaging. I worked from a simple text list of items needed and I created all the creatures and background graphics for the game. I remember that I had to locate and purchase a new Apple IIc to complete my work on. The Apple is long gone, but I still have the Toshiba colour TV I purchased at the time because it came with an RGB monitor port. The Apple came with that little green screen CRT – the Toshiba allowed me to work in limited colour."

In late 1986, Van Caneghem and his team completed their work on *Might And Magic I*, and now it was time to sell the finished product – all 500 kilobytes of its machine-code-programmed glory. Given both the technical limitations of the hardware, and the fact that home computing was a somewhat niche market among beardies who were probably playing *Dungeons & Dragons* in their spare time anyway, one would imagine that solid RPGs had among the highest potential for sales of any home computer genre. As other popular role-playing series had shown, the market was definitely out there, and Origin, SSI and Sir-Tech were all doing very well. Despite all this, publishers were reluctant to take on the title, and Van Caneghem found himself facing numerous rejections. Undeterred due to his confidence that he had a winning title on his hands, he decided to self-publish from home. Handling advertising, marketing and sales himself, Van Caneghem sold around 5,000 copies in the first month, a great reward for his perseverance. With excellent sales figures as proof of his product's quality, he worked out a deal with Activision, and New World Computing was suddenly a fully fledged games development house.



Those tower guardians… nice enough girls, really, but you wouldn't take them home to meet your mum.

Might And Magic A-Z

A is for Alamar – The good King Alamar crops up throughout the early games, and is central to the plot of a number of the titles.

B is for Book One – *Secret Of The Inner Sanctum*, the 1987 RPG that spawned one of the most expansive RPG and strategy franchises ever.

C is for Corak the Mysterious – Corak knows much about the worlds you will be travelling through. Still, all that knowledge and wisdom can't keep the old lore-master out of trouble, as *Might And Magic II: Gates To Another World* showed us.

D is for Divine Intervention – This is a fix-all spell that you would find yourself casting many times by the later stages of the games.

E is for Elements – A big feature in the series, earth, fire, air and water all played a role in both offence and defence, as well as being integral to the nature of *Might And Magic*'s deities.

F is for Fountain Head – The town which served as the starting location of *Might And Magic III*. After completing the opening quest the titular fountains, poisonous at first, offer clues and bonuses for your party.

G is for Guilds – You need to join guilds in order to buy better spells for your magic users. Most can be joined for a sum of gold, while some memberships are only awarded after completing special quests.

H is for Heroes Of Might And Magic – These turn-based strategy titles have seen numerous sequels and expansion packs, as well as their own spin-offs, too.

I is for Isles Of Terra – The third instalment, and easily one of the best in the series, *Isles Of Terra* really is an epic role-playing adventure that is genuinely still fun to play today.

J is for Jon Van Caneghem – Mr Van Caneghem is the mastermind behind it all. Come on, you know that by now.

K is for King Roland – Roland is one of the big shots throughout the series whose regal actions often resulted in your party having to do the gruntwork to sort out his mess. Bloody kings, waste of our time we say.

L is for Light – That all-important visual aid. Provided only by torches or a spell, running out of light deep in a dungeon could result in much time spent literally fumbling around in pitch darkness trying to find an exit.

M is for Might, Magic, Mark Caldwell, Mercenary, Mage, Mandate Of Heaven, Moo, Mirrors, Maps, Monsters, Magic Arrow, Moon Ray, Make Room, Meteor Shower, Mass Distortion, Mega Volts, Meditation, Merchant, Mountaineer, Mines, Melee, and more – There are a lot of Ms in this series, so take your pick.

N is for New World Computing – Later acquired by 3DO, New World Computing was the original talent pool behind the *Might And Magic* games.

O is for Obsidian – This black stone is the best material that weapons and armour can be forged out of, providing all those lovely damage and defence bonuses.

P is for Price Of Loyalty – This expansion pack for *Heroes Of Might And Magic II* was in fact the first expansion that the series ever saw – and started a trend that continued in every title since.

Q is for Quests – Without these, RPGs would be nothing but a bunch of fantasy-themed spreadsheets made up of stats and lists of items.

R is for Robbers – The *Might And Magic* universe's equivalent of the RPG stalwart class, thieves. Able to pick locks as well as skilful with ranged and melee weapons, every party needed one of these bad boys.

S is for Skills – From Pathfinding and Swimming to Cartography and Direction Sense, your characters needed to learn these skills, both to advance to new areas of the maps, as well as to use all of the features both in the game and the interface.

T is for Taverns – Taverns are where you create characters and pick up hirelings, pay the barman for hints and tips, and even get your party members drunk if they enjoy a bit too much of the amber goodness.

U is for Undead Turning – A fantasy game regular, and the *Might And Magic* series was no exception.

V is for Van Caneghem – Seriously. That's what V is for.

W is for Wizard's Eye – One of the most useful and indeed essential spells in the earlier games that simply became part of the interface in later iterations. This spell displayed a mini-map of your surrounding area in the top-right corner, for some much needed dungeon-crawling assistance.

X is for Xeen – The world which served as the location (and part of the title) of three of the *Might And Magic* games.

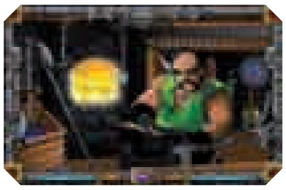
Y is for Yak – The odd religious cult from *Clouds Of Xeen*, players had to battle against Clerics, Priests and Lichs before facing the dreaded Yak Master.

Z is for Zombies – See Undead Turning.

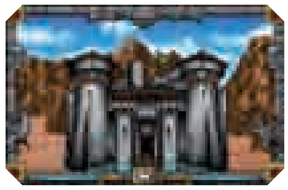
Hitchhiker's Guide to Xeen



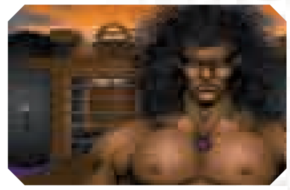
BANKS
Banks are very good places to leave any of your valuables while you are out on the road adventuring.



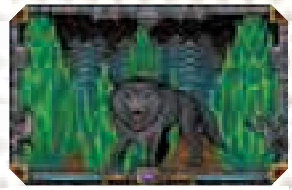
BLACKSMITHS
Not just a place to buy and sell your loot, the blacksmiths also repair broken weapons, and identify all your enchanted items, too.



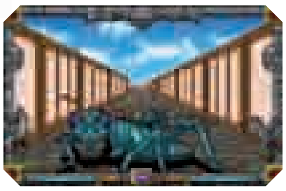
CASTLES
These are no longer all owned by kings. Some are overrun by monsters, while others are run-down and deserted.



CITY GUARD
Some cities and towns require a pass to enter, with this guy serving as a doorman of sorts.



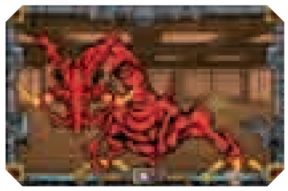
DARKWOLF
The darkwolf is a larger, meaner and more bothersome cousin of the common or garden wolf.



DOOM BUG
Despite being somewhat of a pushover for seasoned warriors, these insects still prove hazardous to novice parties.



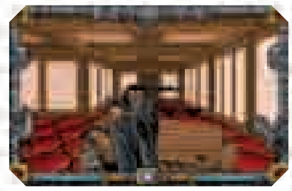
DWARVEN MINES
A must-see for any adventurer, there are gold veins waiting for those who can overcome the nasties that live here.



FIRE DRAGON
Included here more as a warning than anything else, novices are advised to keep well clear of these pyrrhic beasts.



GEMS
Used in the casting of many spells, gems can be found on defeated enemies, mined in caves, or growing on clouds. Somehow.



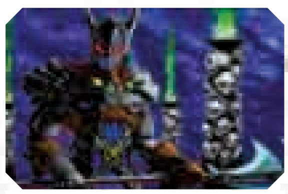
GNOME VAMPIRE
These diminutive irritants serve as a handy stepping-stone for those intent on moving on to battle full-sized vampires.



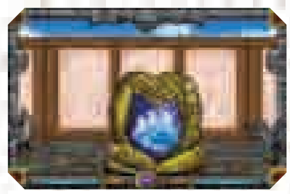
GUILDS
The only place to buy all your spells, the only downside is the often pricey membership fees.



HUTS
You never know what you're gonna get in a hut. Could be a new quest, could be a lair of monsters, could be nothing at all.



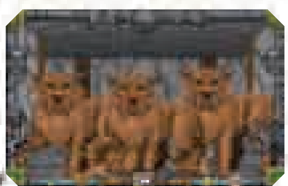
KING ALAMAR
The once good King has not been himself lately, and we therefore advise you to leave this gentleman be.



MAGIC MIRROR
Speak the proper code words and you can be whisked away to (almost) anywhere on, in or above the land of Xeen.



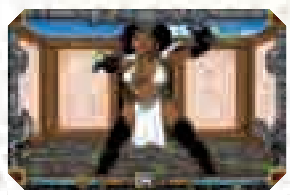
PYRAMIDS
Pyramids teleport you between the lands of the Clouds of Xeen and the Darkside of Xeen.



SABRETOOTHS
Often moving in packs, these mountain-dwelling felines have taken up home in some of the mines of the Gemstone Range.



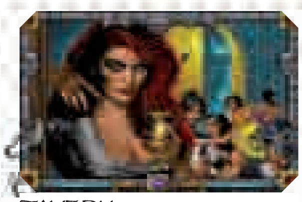
SHRINE
These outdoor temples often bestow blessings upon those who pray at them. Keep an eye out for druids offering odd jobs.



SORCERESS
Do not be fooled by their appearance, these ladies would sooner incinerate you than accept an offer of a goblet of wine.



SWAMP THING
A miserable species, Swamp Things can't be reasoned with. Burn on sight. It's the only language they understand.



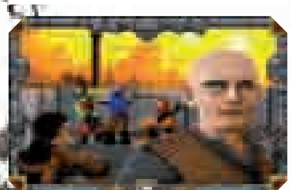
TAVERN
Fill up on food, have a drink, and tip the barmaid in the hopes she might let you in on some of the local gossip.



TEMPLE
The good men and women of the cloth will heal, resurrect and remove curses – for a fee, of course.



TOWER
These are frequented by witches and sorcerers, who seem to love tall buildings. A good place to access the Clouds of Xeen.



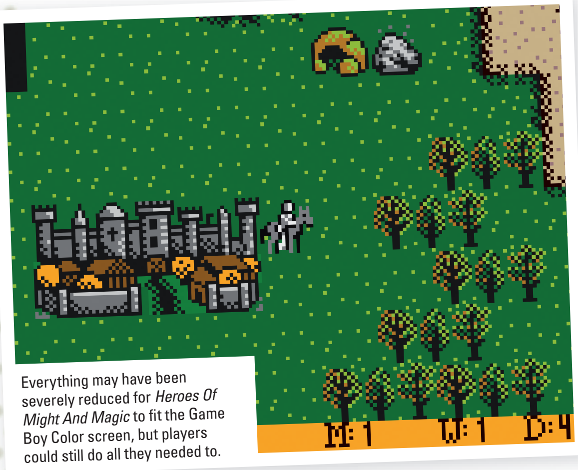
TRAINING GROUND
Gaining experience from your battles and quests does you no good unless you have someone to help you hone your skills.



WAGON
Wagons are used by many folk throughout the lands of Xeen, some offering quests, and some offering special ability training.



WELL
The waters of Xeen can offer magical protection and heroic abilities. But these effects generally don't last long.



Everything may have been severely reduced for *Heroes Of Might And Magic* to fit the Game Boy Color screen, but players could still do all they needed to.

In terms of interface, *Might And Magic I* offered a first-person-perspective graphics window with party stats and other information displayed in text. Gameplay comprised of single-block movement, with each area requiring a pencil and graph paper to map it out, while combat was a fairly standard menu-driven, turn-based affair. In many ways, this formula was a computer RPG staple and had been seen in titles ranging from the early *Ultima* games through to the more recent *Bard's Tale*, which arrived on the scene around the same time as *Secrets Of The Inner Sanctum*. With such a common formula being used in so many games, it was content, story, and innovative tweaks on the part of the designers that saw some titles stand out from the crowd, and New World Computing's work definitely fell into this category. There were 250 different items throughout the game, 94 unique spells at the player's disposal, and a total of 200 monsters to contend with – easily enough variety to entertain even the most demanding RPG nerd. "I was very proud of the finished product," recalls Ferreira. "I display it prominently in my portfolios to this day. A few years ago the original design notes, including the hand-lettered graphs depicting the actual bitmaps for the game were auctioned off at the Classic Games Expo. I wish Jon could have seen the bidding. That alone was gratifying so many years later."

"VAN CANEGHEM PUT GREAT EFFORT INTO MAKING CHARACTER'S RACE AND GENDER AFFECT CERTAIN AREAS OF THE ADVENTURE"

Furthermore, Van Caneghem had crafted a storyline that was deep and clearly very well thought out, creating a sense of history not only for the in-game areas but for the entire *Might And Magic* universe itself. A mysterious race known as the Ancients had long been at work creating and populating microcosmic worlds throughout space, their exact motivations behind this galactic game of *Sim Earth* ultimately unknown. The benevolent Ancients then came under attack from a demonic race known as the Kreegans, who sought to claim these worlds for themselves. To defend against their aggressors, the Ancients appointed guardians for their worlds, but due to the war they became separated from a number of their planets, one of which was VARN – where *Might And Magic I* takes place.

Sheltem, who would feature in the first five *Might And Magic* titles, was guardian of a world known as Terra. Perhaps tempted by the Kreegan demons, or maybe just swayed by a lust for power, Sheltem took advantage of the war to cause all sorts of chaos in his attempt to seize control of Terra for himself. The Ancients, however, had special plans for this world, and dispatched Corak, another guardian, to bring Sheltem to justice and restore order to Terra. Sheltem then fled Terra and travelled to the world of VARN, where he went into hiding.

After travelling the extensive game world, which was one of the largest on offer in any RPG of the time, performing numerous side quests and battling a host of different enemies, the player's party eventually discovers that Sheltem had secretly overthrown King Alamar, lord of VARN, and had been impersonating him all along. At one point, another unique feature of the *Might And Magic* games was revealed: after battling for many, many hours of gameplay through fantasy regulars such as trolls, orcs and minotaurs, players found themselves in a distinctly science-fiction-themed environment, talking with alien creatures at the site of a crashed UFO, where the tale of the interstellar guardians is made known. Thick forests and ancient castles were replaced by the metallic walls of the inside of a space-faring vessel, with clerics and paladins suddenly finding themselves having to use key cards and manipulate computer terminals (VARN, it is revealed, is not just the name of a fantasy world, but rather an acronym for Vehicular Astropod Research Nacelle). Just before the end of the game, the party unmask Sheltem, enter the Inner Sanctum, and travel to CRON, the setting of *Might And Magic II*.



The guy who started it all: ladies and gentlemen, Mr Jon Van Caneghem.

The game – with its huge world, massive variety of enemies, and the story's original sci-fi twists – received great reviews in the gaming press. Apart from the awesome environment, Van Caneghem had also put great effort into making character's race and gender affect certain areas of the adventure – a simple innovation that added another level of depth to this already huge title. All in all, New World Computing's first title was a massive success, and it wasn't long before fans were breathlessly awaiting a sequel.

Might And Magic II, sure enough, was a deserving follow-up. It took all that was good about the original and improved upon it, taking note of criticisms about the original and revamped it all into a larger and 'prettier' quest. By 1988, computer monitors were commonly sporting up to

King's Bounty was an excellent game that would go on to lay the foundations for an epic turn-based strategy series half a decade later.



Corak's Coveted Conversions



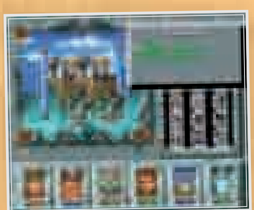
NES

The 8-bit console outing was a port of the original title, *Secrets Of The Inner Sanctum*. It was a fairly accurate rendition, with decent graphics and a faithful re-creation of combat and interface. The only real gripe was that this conversion was released four years after the original, by which time *Might And Magic II* and *III* were already out and being played on other systems. Still, newcomers found themselves with a great deal of adventuring to do, and being the classic that it is, *Secrets Of The Inner Sanctum* proved very rewarding to patient console role-playing gamers.



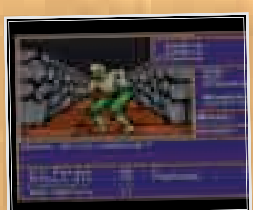
GAME BOY COLOR

While there were no conversions of games from the original series, Nintendo's handheld did see ports of *Heroes Of Might And Magic I* and *II*. As could be expected of such a small screen, the graphics suffered considerably – the trade-off for having so much happening on screen was that very few pixels could be used for each sprite or icon. Still, a remarkable amount of the PC version's features were included, and while not all the details could remain, what was there was still impressive for a Game Boy Color strategy title.



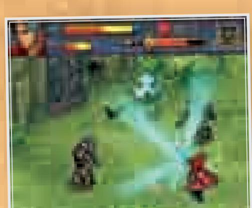
SNES

Iguana Entertainment was responsible for two *Might And Magic* conversions: *Gates To Another World* and *Isles Of Terra*. While the former is more visually appealing on the SNES than on any other system, *Might And Magic III* was the better achievement. As anyone who's played it knows, there's an incredibly huge game world here, and Iguana did a great job of bringing it to console format. It did suffer from being slow to move around, but once you were accustomed to the pace, *Isles Of Terra* was a satisfying departure from the usual top-down RPG fare on the SNES.



MEGA DRIVE

Another 16-bit port of *Gates To Another World*, the Mega Drive version cost a staggering 50 pounds, which may well have scared off a lot of potential *Might And Magic* players. A profitable decision by Electronic Arts, or a mistake that resulted in the company shooting itself in the foot? Still, it was a faithful conversion that was received favourably by those who did play it. Unfortunately, both its hype and its sales paled in comparison to the *Phantasy Star* series, which had a significantly larger Mega Drive fan base.



MOBILE PHONE

Although they are set in Erathia, to be honest we at **Retro Gamer** feel as though the main thing that this duo of *Zelda*-esque action RPG's have in common with the original series is the name. The style of gameplay hasn't really been seen in anything released by New World Computing or 3DO, and as far as we know, Jon Van Caneghem and crew had nothing to do with them at all. Still, these games are of an exceptionally high standard and are well worth the modest asking price. If you've got a compatible mobile phone, you could do a lot worse than download these.



The second game in the series saw a jump to 16-colour graphics and a richer plot in a more expansive game world.

a whopping 16 colours, and the sequel's new-and-improved visuals worked wonders for illustrating the land of CRON. With the better graphics technology, New World Computing could easily have gone the route of creating yet another dark and brooding fantasy world, but instead opted for a bright and colourful environment, something that would become a regular feature in the sequels to come.

For the plot of *Gates To Another World*, Sheltem had yet again caused trouble for the innocent inhabitants of one of the Ancient's world projects. The arrival of such a powerful entity had shifted CRON's orbit out of sync, and as luck would have it the world was now hurtling directly towards the sun. It was therefore up to the player to right Sheltem's wrong, yet again. Essentially, the interface and overall feel of the game mirrored that of its prequel, and fans – edgy for more of the same fantasy fun – lapped it up eagerly.

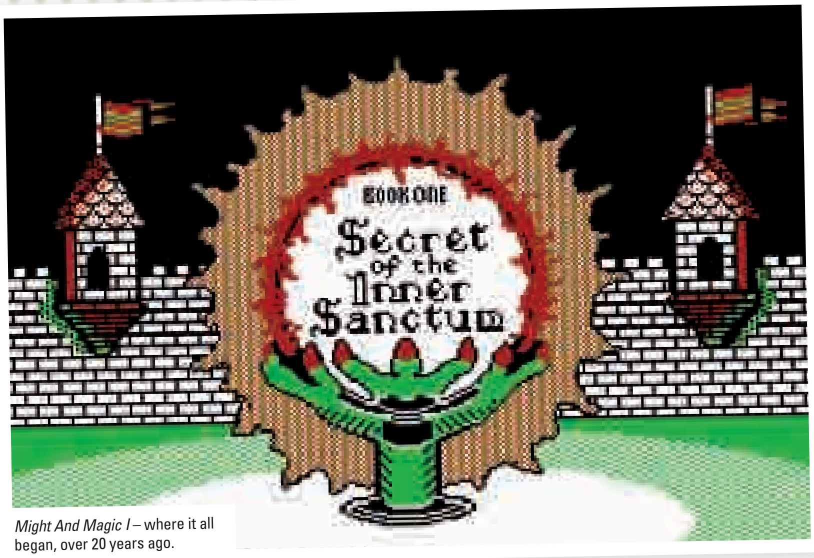
Another title, another success – and this time, other developers were taking notice. New World Computing signed deals for the licensing of console versions of *Might And Magic I* and *II*, and before long the games were playable on NES, SNES, and Mega Drive, plus Japanese translations for the PC-Engine/TurboGrafx 16. Things were working out well for the company, *Might And Magic* was going from strength to strength, and it became clear that a third instalment of the series would have to be made.

Might And Magic III, released in 1991, was not so much an improvement as a giant leap for the series. The VGA and digitised audio revolution was in full swing, and New World Computing more than came to the party for the telling of the adventurers' search for Sheltem on his own land, the world of Terra. This was a title that had fans and newcomers rejoicing at the masterful use of technology to create an interactive first-person role-playing experience the likes of which had not been experienced before. The closest comparison would of course be SSI's brilliant 1990 release, *Eye Of The Beholder*, but while that was set in the claustrophobic sewers under Waterdeep, *Might And Magic III* – like its predecessors – offered wide expanses for adventurers to explore. Dotting the brightly coloured, beautifully illustrated and exceptionally painstakingly planned landscape were numerous caverns, keeps and castles. In turn, each of these had the potential for multiple levels, towers and dungeons, the end result of which was a world that was simply massive. Another major improvement was that now some levels boasted a giant 32x32 block area, which was a considerable leap up from the 16x16 limit of the previous two titles.

On top of the graphical overhaul and improved playing environment, the interface itself saw some major enhancements. Character portraits finally made their way into the *Might And Magic* franchise, the game had icons for full mouse control, and the ever-useful top-right area used for a mini-map (which doubled as the display of the Wizard's Eye spell) showed more detail than ever. In addition, the viewing window now had a number of little monsters which served as indicators if your characters possessed certain abilities or had the



World Of Xeen was the utterly HUGE adventure which resulted from installing *Might And Magic IV* and *V* together.



Might And Magic I – where it all began, over 20 years ago.

relative spells active. For example, a little gargoyle would flap its wings if you were levitating (thanks to a spell), or the bat at the top would open and close its mouth in warning of any nearby enemies, if your characters had the Danger Sense skill. Furthermore, while *Secrets Of The Inner Sanctum* and *Gates To Another World* required players to visit an inn to save their game, *Isles Of Terra* allowed saving (practically) anywhere. So while this did allow players to cheat – err, that is, 'strategically plan' which of their characters would benefit from that permanent +1 charisma bonus-giving barrel, it also removed the frustration of losing half an hour's worth of adventuring because of some unlucky roll of the virtual dice on the way home.

Another area in which *Might And Magic III* stood out from some of its competition was that the pre-generated party characters were actually really good. So good, that you did not necessarily feel the need to create their own party. The option was included of course – after all, what kind of RPG would it be if character creation were not allowed? Preposterous! So, while other games may have shipped with a party that covered the basics and let you get straight into the game, the *Might And Magic* pre-gen parties actually felt like they genuinely belonged in that world and were genuine people that belonged on Terra. Add to this that character's faces changed to display their status (poisoned, cursed, weak) and you started to get a sense of personality for your party that the words-and-numbers displays of old simply couldn't provide.

If all this wasn't enough *Might And Magic III* also had auto-mapping of unrivalled detail (if you had the Cartography skill), an extensive automatic quest log to track your progress, and a very useful 'notes' feature which would remember every location you'd visited to date – exceptionally handy for those who didn't feel like having to jot down all the x/y coordinates of the various wells and fountains that gave you bonus spell points, protection from elements, temporary level boosts, and the like.

Given the great reception of *Isles Of Terra*, it was little surprise that the formula barely changed for the fourth and fifth games, *Clouds Of Xeen* and *Darkside Of Xeen*. Interface, gameplay and pretty much the whole dynamic of these two felt like an extension of *Might And Magic III*, but this was not a bad thing. Graphics were improved, a new soundtrack was put together, and the worlds were made with the same love and attention to detail as in the previous titles. So, while they offered little new under the hood, the *Xeen* games were far from rushed titles or cash-ins on a winning formula.

And while there were no major changes to the game system, they did offer the very impressive feature that if both games were installed to one directory, a bigger quest became available that required players to traverse between the two game worlds via magic pyramids. It was revealed that Xeen was a disk-like world (sound familiar?) with the Clouds world on the top and the Darkside below. Both games offered more of the same epic quests that we'd come to know and love, and to play the two together delivered a *Might And Magic* adventure of staggering proportions. A fan-made title using the same engine, *Swords Of Xeen* was later released (see 'Swords Of Xeen' boxout) and was yet another show of the franchise's popularity.

World Of Xeen was a particular high point in the series, and proved another hit among reviewers and fans alike, and was later re-released in an updated CD-ROM version that required all of 2MB of RAM to play, and came with the addition of digitised speech, no less.

Now we must shuffle back a few years to 1990. *Might And Magic I* and *II* had already seen some great success, and Van Caneghem felt it was a good time to try his hand on another type of game entirely. What if New World Computing could put together a fantasy title that could combine the best elements of strategy and role-playing into one? The result was *King's Bounty*, which became another amazingly popular title for the steadily growing company.

Van Caneghem's wife, who loved *King's Bounty*, urged him to make a sequel. He resisted for many years, working instead on more *Might And Magic* titles, but eventually her persistence managed to win him over, and in 1995 *Heroes Of Might And Magic* was born. It was the spiritual successor to *King's Bounty*, and anyone who has played both will recognise

The original advert for *Might And Magic I*, which gave potential players a glimpse of the expansive game world that awaited them.





Random dice rolls, numerous stats, a variety of classes and the opportunity to give ourselves silly fantasy names. Yup, we're role-playing alright!

Swords of Xeen

A fan-made addition to the *Xeen* series, *Swords* had professional quality writing, a huge quest, and more of the same puzzles and adventures that *Might And Magic* regulars have come to love. Generally, fan-made projects are a far cry from the quality of the originals, but when the 'fans' are bestselling fantasy and science-fiction authors, you can expect something more than, say, the *Star Trek* mini-episodes floating around the internet. *Swords Of Xeen*, therefore, turned out to be a great title in its own right. Built using the same engine as *Clouds* and *Darkside*, with only a few minor tweaks, *Swords* was a darker-themed and arguably more challenging game than its predecessors. As could be expected from the minimal budget available, however, *Swords* lacked the depth and variety of side-encounters that were so prominent in *MM III*, *IV* and *V*, and rather than a richly populated game world, players sometimes found themselves in a sparse and at times empty environment. Still, highly recommended for those that enjoy the *Might And Magic* style of gameplay.

similarities between the underlying mechanics of both titles.

Today, *Heroes* must stand as one of the most successful spin-offs of all time. Inspired by an old title and set in a well-established game world, what started as a side venture became a full-fledged series that has outlived the games that gave birth to it. Sequels and expansions are still being made today, and it's interesting to see that the core gameplay, even now, is so similar to that of *King's Bounty* released a good 18 years ago.

But let us return to the tale at hand. Acquisitions and takeovers were par for the course in the mid-Nineties videogaming world, and anyone with a successful back catalogue was snatched up in the hopes of adding to the profits. So it was that in 1996, New World Computing went the way of Origin, Sierra and SSI when it was bought by 3DO. The 3DO Company was another venture by Trip Hawkins that was originally founded to manufacture the 3DO console. After poor initial sales attributed to a radically overpriced cost for the system, coupled with an inability to compete with Sony's newfangled PlayStation machine, 3DO threw out its hardware division and focused instead only on games development and publishing – not entirely unlike what would happen to Sega a few years later.

In April 1998, 3DO released *Might And Magic VI: The Mandate Of Heaven*, which saw the first major overhaul to the series since the jump to 256-colour graphics seven years before. It had been half a decade since *Darkside Of Xeen* hit shelves, and fans were getting edgy for more of the adventuring that they knew and loved – but the natural march of progress meant they were in store for something new. Through *Doom* and *Quake*, id Software had shaken up the gaming world, and if you weren't working in 3D by the late-Nineties, you were lagging too far behind.

> "THE SEQUELS THAT FOLLOWED MIGHT AND MAGIC VI OFFERED NEXT TO NOTHING IN THE WAY OF TECHNICAL IMPROVEMENT"

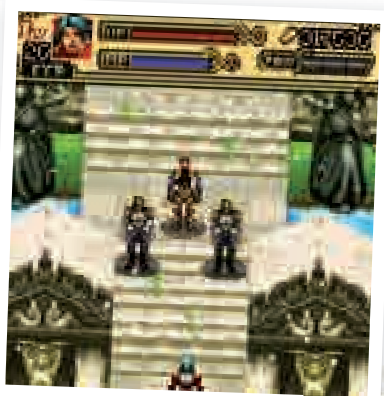
And so it was that Van Caneghem and Co left the old turn-based, block movement first-person RPGs behind and stepped into 3D. Players had the option of pausing the game for turn-based combat, or fighting it out in real-time. It was a bit of an adjustment, to be sure, but for fans who gave it some time, the new formula worked. It was different, and perhaps it didn't entirely capture the soul of the previous five games, but Van Caneghem's trademark feel was present in the new game. The story was a slight change from the original, as it followed on from the plot of *Heroes Of Might And Magic II*. Sheltem was gone, but the Kreegans were still causing havoc. It was a decent enough premise, and a good effort to tie the *Heroes* games and core series together. On the whole, the game worked, even if some fans were disappointed with the new style, and 3DO's first release in the *Might And Magic* series was a winner.

But then something unfortunate happened: the sequels that followed *Might And Magic VI* offered next to nothing in the way of technical improvement. Now while this had been fine for the years between *Might And Magic III* through to *V*, the pace at which the gaming world was moving at the turn of the millennium was simply too rapid for this oversight. 3DO, by not prioritising resources into developing or licensing more powerful graphics engines, was putting out software that was dated before it was released. A quick glance at the screens will show very little graphical improvement between *Might And Magic VI* and *VIII*, which meant it was only the most hardcore of fans that were getting major kicks out of the series. So, while gamers had already feasted on (and been spoiled by) the likes of *Quake II*, *Unreal* and *Deus Ex*, the *Might And Magic* series was getting by on role-playing goodness alone. Reviewers were thoughtful enough to laud the merits of the gameplay and the story, but across the board, attitudes towards the graphics were always unfavourable. In the evolving marketplace of the time, one required more than just a core fan base to stay competitive.

3DO would release one more sequel, *Might And Magic IX*, in 2002. An abysmal letdown, the title was marred by numerous game-killing bugs, had graphics that were now leagues behind the industry standard, and in many ways felt like a step backwards for the series. Tim Lang, who was lead designer on *Might And Magic IX*, explains, "I think there's two reasons why *Might And Magic* took such a drastic downturn. First and foremost 3DO seemed intent on driving every single intellectual property they owned into the ground. We got shorter and shorter schedules, and less and less financial support from them. In *MM IX*'s case, a lot of the people we were depending on to finish the game were tied up with finishing *Legends Of Might And Magic*. Since that thing just stayed around and lingered in the depths of 'not being doneness' it really pushed *MM IX* onto a tighter schedule. Second, I'm pretty sure Van Caneghem was burned out,

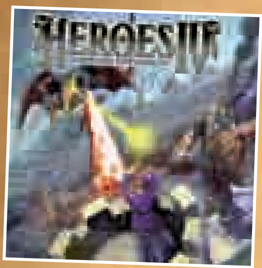


Might And Magic VI saw the change from the turn-based 'block movement' of previous titles to a 3D environment, offering players the option of real-time combat for the first time ever.



More akin to traditional console RPG's than the normal *Might And Magic* style, the mobile phone versions are nevertheless great handheld titles in their own rights.

Sheltem's Selected Spin-offs



HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

A spin-off that spawned an entire series, this is now in its fifth iteration (plus more if you include the numerous expansion packs). A succession of excellent, addictive and deeply engrossing turn-based strategy titles that every gamer should try.



LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Regarded by most as a letdown, this came across as little more than an attempt to re-create *Counter-Strike* in a fantasy setting (the tag line on the box even read "Online team combat goes medieval"). Really not worth looking into. For shame, 3DO, for shame.



WARRIORS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

A rubbish title with lacklustre graphics, fiddly controls and terribly frustrating game mechanics. Why this was even released, we don't know. If we could have it our way, the budgets for *Legends* and *Warriors* should have been combined to make another core role-playing title.



CRUSADERS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

An action-oriented RPG, this third-person title for PC and PlayStation tried to combine *Diablo* with *Might And Magic*, but didn't quite get it right, ending up a bit too linear and lacking in depth. Not an utter failure, but not quite the game it could've been if it had been given a bit more time.



DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Not quite retro, but *Might And Magic* enough to be here. With an updated version of the Steam engine, a story that ties in to the later *Heroes* titles, *Dark Messiah* is an excellent addition to the franchise. Look out for the recently released Xbox 360, *Dark Messiah: Elements*.

disillusioned and just didn't like coming to work any more. Most of us rarely saw him around the office, and when we did see him, he usually told us that we were doing things wrong much too late for us to fix them. He's made no bones about disliking *MM IX*. I think that if he had taken a more proactive role in its development, things might have turned out better. As far as the reason why *MM IX* was considered the worst in the series, that's really because we delivered a game that was pre-alpha at best. It needed at least another three months, if not another six to get it to a playable level of quality. Knowing we didn't have much time, we cut a lot of corners, and left out features the fans liked, but would have been too time consuming to implement. It was a half-done game, and it shows."

Just a few months later, 3DO declared bankruptcy and it became evident that what felt like a rushed title with minimal attention to detail and next to no quality assurance was just that: a company's desperate final outing during a time of crisis. If we consider that *Might & Magic IX* hit the shelves around the same time as *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, it becomes clear just how far behind 3DO's technology was, what dismal testing the title had, and, moreover, that the company was in dire straits indeed.

For many hardcore fans, the first five games were what *Might And Magic* is all about, with *World Of Xeen* being the pinnacle of the series. It incorporated all the elements that made the series popular in the first place, with a colourful environment, a huge array of side quests, loads of carefully crafted puzzles, all of which was delivered via an interface that was as good as one could hope for in a turn-based first-person RPG. There were more sequels in the original series, sure, and the *Heroes* games are excellent too, but at its core, *Might And Magic* is all about role-playing in an epic fantasy world that doesn't take itself too seriously. Trying to keep up with the 3D graphics revolution coupled with the unrealistic development cycles imposed by 3DO did not do this series any favours, and some fans go so far as to deny the existence of the post-*Xeen* titles.

Still, rather than lament the downward slide of the last few titles, let us look back with fondness on the core titles that Van Caneghem and New World Computing put together: *Might And Magic I* to *V*. They have entertained millions of fans, and now serve as excellent examples of the state of computer role-playing in the early Nineties. Their quests were fun, character development was great, the maps were carefully planned out, and the series had an undeniable look and feel all of its own. And for us at least, the early *Might And Magic* games stand testament to the single greatest era in computer gaming: when what mattered was not benchmarks or graphics drivers, frame rates or latest patches, but simply having fun, wandering around losing yourself for days on end in huge and immersive fantasy worlds. Thanks, Jon, for all the adventures.

(**Retro Gamer** would like to thank Celestial Heavens for their help with this article. Check them out at www.celestialheavens.com)



And once the ale has been drunk, the dragons slain and the virgins rescued, isn't THIS what it's all about?



retro shamer

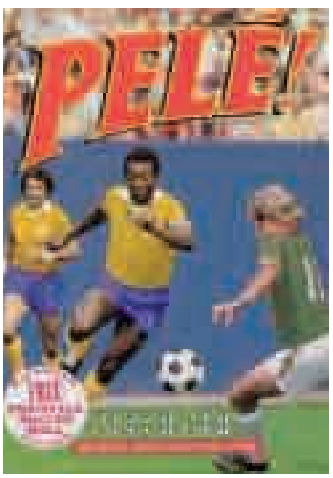
Pelé

IF YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF INVITED TO A DINNER PARTY, AND IF AT THAT PARTY YOU'RE ASKED TO GIVE A DEFINITION OF THE WORD IRONY, THERE ARE ONLY THREE WORDS YOU NEED TO SAY: PELÉ THE VIDEOGAME. THEN REEL OFF, WORD FOR WORD, EVERYTHING STUART HUNT'S ABOUT TO TELL YOU IN THE NEXT TWO PAGES

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ACCOLADE
- » **DEVELOPER:** RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS
- » **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** CHAMPIONSHIP SOCCER AKA PELÉ'S SOCCER



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Now we can't work out if this is a credible painting or a really ugly photograph, but we're going to give Accolade the benefit of the doubt here (given that we've been so mean to the publisher in this feature) and as such, will give it top marks and a hundred high-fives. Also, we think it's very in-keeping with the Roy Of The Rovers-style football strips that you can create in the main game. Not a bad cover this one really; it certainly has an old-school feel, which, for obvious reasons, we like.



» Just a little bit over the top for a simple pass back, we think.

Pelé first lent his name to a videogame back in 1980, to a rudimentary but enjoyable footy game for the Atari 2600 created by Steve Wright. Impressively, the talented Atari coder candidly admitted to creating the game having never watched a game of football. However, in 1993 tragedy struck. Pelé followed up his promising videogame debut with a 16-bit *FIFA*-like game. Courtesy of Radical Entertainment, the game took everything that was great about football, *FIFA* and Pelé, and mashed the leftovers into a sport that looked like 22 malnourished pensioners fighting over an oversized Murray Mint.



» If you stare continually at this picture the ref's arm begins to look broken.

The game opened with a foggy, pseudo-FMV clip – the size of a postage stamp – showing someone that resembled Pelé scoring a goal. The grainy video then cut out to show the Accolade logo, with that "Games with personality" tag line it opted to roll with back then, it then returns to another postage stamp showing a team indulging in some kind of molestation.

Now, Pelé's team roster is slightly bemusing. It lets you select teams from Earth, but selects a random set of provinces while enforcing this peculiar disdain for country's capitals. So, flicking the cursor over to England, for instance, gives you the option to play as Liverpool, Manchester or Norwich. And the peculiarity doesn't end there, as the game's menu screen brilliantly defaults to teams that you would never pick in a month of Sundays (like Brugge), or David and Goliath-type matchups such as Milan versus Nkana – forcing you to venture into its shabby option screen. And if you're a football stickler, *Pelé*'s 'garish pub-team kit' creator, and its thinking that Liverpool's home



» "And there's a packed stadium here today for this dramatic clash between Montevideo and Santiago."



» "I don't want to be Lima! I want to be Norwich!"



» That's a goal! Granted, a 'goalie couldn't be arsed' goal. But they all count.

kit is frog green, will probably be enough to ensure that you never actually make it past the option screen.

Pelé is played on an isometric pitch, à la *FIFA*, but is flipped round so you're either playing towards the top-left or bottom-right side of the screen. You'll also realise that the matches are continually permeated by this annoying white noise, which is used to signify the ref pulling out a card, blowing his whistle or to celebrate a goal being scored. Unfortunately, from our screens you can't see just how inanimate the crowds are. However, during the game they're also very vocal, and when your man is running up the pitch with the ball, sort of at his feet, the crackly jeering from the terraces will be enough to cause your ears to shut down. It's fair to say that *Pelé* is a better experience with the sound switched off. This way you can pretend the entire stadium is gripped in a thrall of excitement, too engrossed to murmur a word or flex a single facial muscle.

Lazily, your teams will be made up of exactly the same footballer, and gameplay will consist of waddling up or down the field, chasing a ball that never feels like it's connecting with anything. Watch as a simple love-tap towards the keeper sends him flying into all sorts of unnecessary dives, courtesy of *Pelé*'s sluggish engine trying to offer a convincing account of somebody trying to catch a football. This brings us to our final gripe: the AI. Your computer opponents will graciously kick the ball out of play, despite being put under no pressure for a clearance, keepers will occasionally scuff goal kicks and sliding tackles feel like evasive squats. In fact, it's highly probable that living inside *Pelé*'s cartridge is a seedy underworld of wires and solder balls, trading high volumes of dirty cash for illegal Mega Drive match-fixing.

Pelé isn't the worst football game we've ever played, but it certainly deserves an honourable mention for using a football legend and falling so far short of the mark. What should've been a legendary game of football, instead becomes a legendary demonstration of irony.

retro shamer

POINTLESS PART



A sliding tackle is always a gamble. Like a timely head butt in a boxing game, it's supposed to add a sense of risk and reward. Recently, it's slowly becoming a charitable device to give your opponent a free kick, or when you're 11 goals down, it helps you feel better about yourself by breaking the legs of your mate's players. In *Pelé*, the slide tackle is a useless move, which involves seeing your man perform an animation that's less an opportune slide and more a Spider-Man pose. The success rate of such a move sits in the 'what's the actual point' domain of *Pelé*.

[A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER]

Hey friends, it's me, Pelé. First, a big thanks to all those people who bought my Mega Drive game back in 1993. Right on! And for those that didn't I have this to say: not only would your lives have benefited from some sublime footy action, but you would also have got a neat batch of my patented formation hints that you could've applied to real football situations. Here's an example, to show you what you missed: remember that the 5-2-3 formation is an aggressive defensive strategy, as play will usually stay in your half. If you find yourself lagging behind by about 12 or 16 goals and are a gambling sort, this is probably a great formation for you.



"IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT PELÉ IS A BETTER EXPERIENCE WITH THE SOUND SWITCHED OFF"

BEST OF BRITISH

THE EARLY EIGHTIES WITNESSED AN EXPLOSION IN THE UK PERSONAL COMPUTER MARKET, WITH MANUFACTURERS FALLING OVER THEMSELVES TO GRAB A SLICE OF THE ACTION. BUT WITH NO CLEAR STANDARDS AND LITTLE IDEA OF WHAT USERS REALLY WANTED, THE MARKET QUICKLY BECAME A MINEFIELD FOR THOSE LOOKING TO BUY THEIR FIRST MICRO. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT THE BEST OF THESE BRITISH MACHINES – SOME COMMON, SOME NOT SO – AND ASKS THREE QUESTIONS OF EACH ONE: WAS IT ANY GOOD? HOW DID IT FARE? AND, CRUCIALLY, COULD YOU PLAY MANIC MINER ON IT?



» Although Oric ran into difficulties in 1984, the Oric-1 was followed by the Atmos and Telestrat. The latter was not released in the UK.



» Despite the title the Jupiter ACE was anything but. Releasing a monochrome computer in 1983 was commercial suicide.

When it comes to developing and adopting new technology the UK has generally lagged behind the US by a good couple of years. By the time Clive Sinclair released the MK14 kit computer in June 1978, the States had already seen the launch of the Apple II, the Tandy TRS-80 and the Commodore PET. These pioneering machines were complete integrated computers, where as the MK14 was little more than a fancy calculator with a hex keyboard and LED display. Obviously it would be unfair to compare a £40 kit with much more expensive machines (at the time of the MK14's launch an imported Apple II would cost a cool grand), but it highlights the maturity of the US market compared to the UK at the time. Sir Clive was well aware of the advances being made over the pond – he'd seen it for himself at an electronics fair in San Francisco in 1977. Branching off into the micro market was an experiment that paid off – more than 50,000 MK14s were sold, and it paved the way for Sinclair's next machine, the ZX80.

Released in February 1980, the ZX80 offered much more than the MK14. It had an alphanumeric keyboard, a cassette interface and a modulator for TV output. It had 1K of RAM, built-in BASIC, and at its heart was the popular low-cost Z80 microprocessor. It was heady stuff. By far its most attractive feature was the price – just £79 in kit form or £99 pre-built, making it the first ready-assembled computer to be available for under £100. Compare this to the TRS-80 or the PET, both of which would set you back five times that amount, a price your average punter was not prepared to pay. The ZX80 was affordable and accessible to the man on the street. It was the perfect entry-level machine for someone wishing to learn about computers.



With sales reaching over 100,000 in less than 18 months (of which a reported 60 per cent were sold overseas), the ZX80 was yet another Sinclair success story. But it was just the beginning. The ZX81, released in March 1981, clocked up sales of 400,000 in a single year. This new model introduced better BASIC and high-resolution graphics among a number of other improvements, but Sinclair actually sold the ZX81 for less money than the ZX80 (£49 for the kit, and £69 for the pre-built model). This was mainly due to a more efficient internal design, which reduced the number of chips, making it cheaper to manufacture. The price was right, and within two years of release the ZX81 rocketed past the magical 1 million sales mark. Home computing in the UK was no longer a niche.

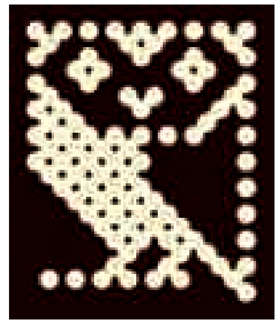
A cottage industry sprang up to support the ZX81. The machine was better suited to



"THE PRICE WAS RIGHT, AND WITHIN TWO YEARS OF RELEASE THE ZX81 ROCKETED PAST THE MAGICAL 1 MILLION SALES MARK. HOME COMPUTING IN THE UK WAS NO LONGER A NICHE"


sinclair
ZX81
RETURN
SHIFT
CAPS LOCK

BEST OF BRITISH



» The wide-eyed owl, perched on the top-right-hand corner of the BBC Micro keyboard, was the symbol for the BBC Computer Literacy Project.

EMULATOR RECOMMENDATOR

AH, THE JOY OF EMULATION. ALL OF THE COMPUTERS MENTIONED IN THE FEATURE CAN BE EMULATED ON A WINDOWS PC (AND QUITE POSSIBLY A MAC, TOO). HERE'S OUR LIST OF RECOMMENDED FREEWARE EMULATORS AND WHERE TO GET THEM:

MACHINE	EMULATOR	HOMEPAGE
Acorn Atom	Atom Emulator	www.stairwaytohell.com/atom/wouterras
ZX80/81	XTender2	www.delhez.demon.nl
BBC Micro	BeebEm	www.mikebuk.dsl.pipex.com/beebem/index.html
Spectrum	ZX Spin	www.worldofspectrum.org/emulators.html
Dragon 32	XRoar	www.6809.org.uk/dragon/xroar.shtml
Oric-1	Euphoric	http://oric.ifrance.com/oric/index_english.html
Camputers Lynx	PALE	http://heraclion.users.btopenworld.com/palelynx.htm
Jupiter ACE	EightyOne	www.aptanet.org/eightyone
Grundy NewBrain	NewBrain Emulator	http://newbrain.50webs.org
Memotech MTX500	Mt Xemu	http://mtxemu.classicgaming.gamespy.com
Sinclair QL	QL2K	http://www.jadiam.org/QL/index.php
Amstrad CPC	Caprice32	www.caprice32.cybercube.com



» We love Spectrum Man, if only because he somehow has the power to make the Speccy display an orange background.

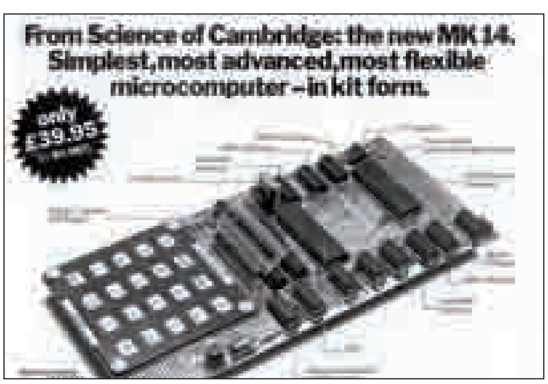
running games than the ZX80, so the floodgates opened with a large volume of cassette-based software sold via mail order and through specialist dealers (after all, the ZX81's membrane keyboard didn't exactly lend itself to programming your own arcade clones). Sinclair's next machine, the ZX Spectrum, became even more synonymous with gaming thanks to the addition of colour graphics, sound support and extra memory. We won't dwell on the all-conquering Spectrum here as it's been covered in detail before (see **Retro Gamer** issues 19 and 48, in particular), but its importance in the UK computing market cannot be overstated enough. We'd also like to reiterate the fact that iconic British platformer *Manic Miner* began life on the Speccy before being ported to just about every other 8-bit computer around. Some years later a guy named Ales

"OTHER BRITISH MICROS JOINED THE FRAY IN 1983 INCLUDING THE CAMPUTERS LYNX, JUPITER ACE, GRUNDY NEWBRAIN AND THE MEMOTECH MTX. NONE ACHIEVED ANYWHERE NEAR THE SAME LEVEL OF MARKET PENETRATION AS THE SPECTRUM"

Martinik even managed to shoehorn an amazingly faithful version of the game onto the ZX81.

The downside of success for Sinclair was competition from rival manufacturers. This was nothing new, however, as Sinclair had been competing with fellow Cambridge company Acorn Computing for years. Chris Curry left Sinclair in 1978 to establish Acorn and released the System 1 in January 1979, a kit computer that shared many similarities with the MK14. This was not simple mimicry, however, as the System 1 was the first in a series of 6502-based machines aimed at serious enthusiasts. When it came to catering for the consumer market, Acorn developed the Atom, a computer that had more in common with the established US machines than the cheap, cheerful and relatively toy-like ZX80.

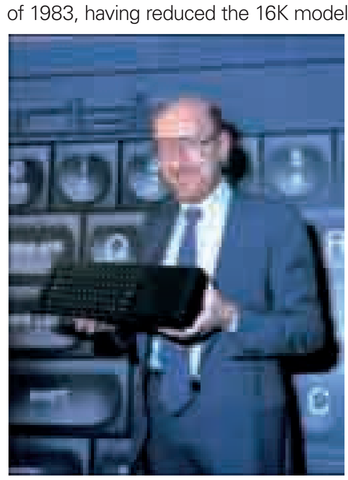
» Where it all began. The MK14 was Sinclair's first microcomputer, paving the way for the hugely successful ZX range.



Released a few months after the ZX80, the Atom looked like a proper computer with a pleasingly chunky case and a finger-pleasing full travel keyboard. As was the norm back then, it came as a kit or pre-assembled, and with 2K RAM and 8K ROM as standard. What made the Atom special was that it was designed with expandability in mind. The RAM and ROM could be upped internally to 12K each (with more memory bolted on externally, if required) and various expansion cards could be slotted in place. Perhaps its greatest asset, however, came at no added cost. Atom BASIC was generally regarded as the best in the business, being much more powerful and intuitive than Sinclair's flavour.

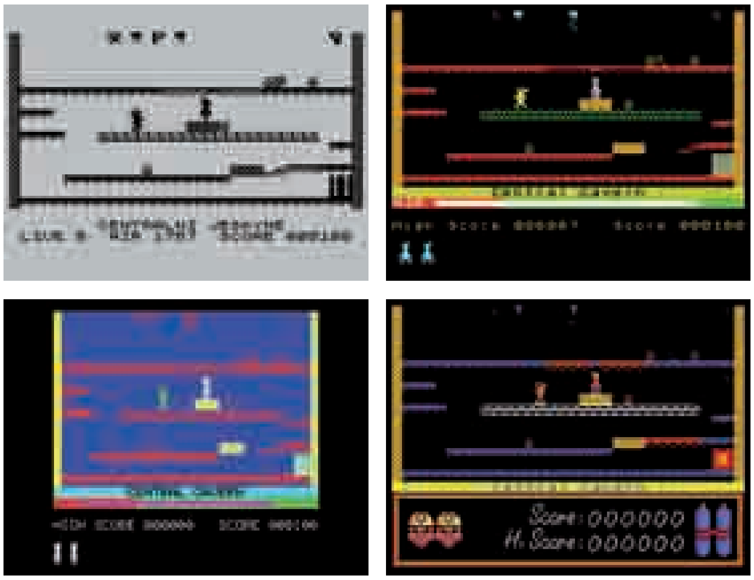
At launch, a pre-assembled Atom with 12K RAM and ROM retailed for £330. At this price it attracted the more serious user, although games were available from familiar names such as Quicksilva, Bug-Byte (no *Manic Miner* though!) and, of course, Acornsoft. Perhaps its biggest claim to fame was that both David Braben and Ian Bell began coding games for the machine before collaborating to create the awesome *Elite* for the Atom's successor, the Proton. As you'll no doubt already know, particularly if you read the Retroinspection in **Retro Gamer** issue 42, the Proton was released in late 1981 under the name BBC Micro after Acorn was chosen by the broadcaster to provide a machine to feature in a television series about the exciting new world of micro computing. The 'Beeb' was a clear successor to the Atom, taking the basic 6502 setup and offering more memory (16 or 32K, depending on the model), a larger 32K ROM which held an enhanced version of Atom BASIC (dubbed BBC BASIC), and a whole host of expansion ports for connecting stuff. The Beeb really was feature rich, and you had to be rich to afford one. The premium Model B launched at £335, later rising to £399 to cover increased production costs. Still, more than 1.5 million Beebs were sold in total, mainly to the education market where around 70 per cent of schools chose the machine to place in their computing rooms. Although this gave the Beeb a stuffy image, a large library of gaming software was written for the machine, including classics like *Elite*, *Repton*, *Revs* and *Exile*. *Manic Miner* was ported to the machine, too. Just in case you were wondering.

The Beeb occupies an important place in the history of British computing, but it was the Spectrum that really kicked things into overdrive, building on the momentum of the ZX81. In the latter half of 1983, having reduced the 16K model to just £99, Sinclair was shifting 50,000 units a month and struggling to meet demand. These numbers were unprecedented, and other manufacturers were attracted to the consumer end of this growing market like moths to a flame. And yes, many of them burnt their wings.



» Sir Clive at the Sinclair QL's launch. We're guessing he wasn't as chuffed when he checked the order book.

Let's look at some of the main contenders. There was the Dragon 32, forged in Port Talbot and unofficially based on the Tandy Color Computer. This versatile 32K micro launched in August 1982

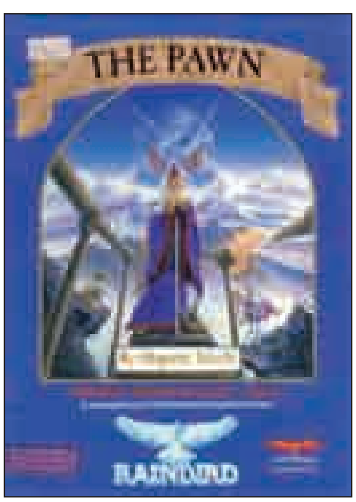


» The many faces of *Manic Miner.* The versions from top to bottom: ZX81, Spectrum, Oric-1 and SAM Coupé.

at £175 (the same price as a 48K Spectrum) to encouraging sales (40,000 units sold in the first six months), but its unusual 6809 processor meant that it was difficult to port software across from the more popular Z80 and 6502 machines (Software Projects managed to release *Manic Miner* for it, of course, even throwing in a couple of bonus screens for good measure). Sales soon began to tail off and constant delays to the launch of the bigger memory Dragon 64 didn't help matters. Dragon Data was declared bankrupt in July 1984, and six months later Oric went the same way.

Oric's bold but slightly stupid plan was to try to steal a march on Sinclair by offering more machine for less money. It got things half right, as the Oric-1 was slightly ahead of the Speccy in terms of hardware (built-in Microsoft BASIC, better sound, more ports, less colour clash), but when it came to pricing Oric was unable to undercut Sinclair. In fact, Oric was unable to get the damned machine to market due to manufacturing problems, and when units did start to trickle through in early 1983, it was revealed that the ROM and the cassette loading system were bugged. At least there was uplifting news on *Manic Miner* front. The game was released for the Oric-1, complete with 12 extra screens, but even the magical influence of Miner Willy could not reverse Oric's fading fortunes.

Other British microcomputers that joined the fray in 1983 included the Camputers Lynx, a relatively advanced computer available with 48, 96 or 128K RAM; the Jupiter ACE, a monochrome machine famous for including FORTH rather than BASIC as its built-in language; the brilliantly named Grundy NewBrain, an odd little micro with a built-in 16-character display; and the Memotech MTX series of computers that were similar to the MSX standard. These machines were all Z80-based, just like the Spectrum, and each boasted their own unique features, but none of them achieved anywhere near the same level of market penetration as the Speccy. We'd suggest it was because you couldn't play *Manic Miner* on any of them, but that would make us sound slightly mad.



» Magnetic Scrolls' *The Pawn* was written for the QL before finding greater success on other platforms.

Seemingly no one could stop Sinclair at the time, so when Sir Clive turned his attention to business machines it was widely predicted that he would aggressively corner this lucrative market. The Sinclair QL (Quantum Leap, no less) was launched in January 1984, but things didn't exactly go to plan. On paper the QL looked formidable – a 32-bit machine with 128K RAM (easily expandable to 640K), built-in mass storage, a multitasking OS and a bundled office suite, all for £399. However, to hit this bargain price point compromises were made at almost every stage of development. The powerful Motorola 68000-series processor was hamstrung by an 8-bit databus that limited performance. For storage, Sinclair's clever but unreliable Microdrive cartridge system was chosen over a floppy drive. And then there was the low-cost keyboard that was far too unresponsive for business users. Production problems and buggy system software sealed the QL's fate, resulting in an expensive and high-profile failure for Sinclair. The machine did receive decent software support, mainly business software as you'd expect, but also some games. While there was no *Manic Miner* port it was home to a great little homage called *QL Cavern.*

Thankfully the most significant event of 1984 was not the failure of the QL but the successful arrival of a British Z80-based machine that didn't fall by the wayside like all the others. The Amstrad CPC 464 [about time – Ed] was a machine aimed at the electronics-buying masses. It was a complete package, consisting of a 64K colour computer with integrated cassette deck and bundled monitor (either green-screen or colour). It really was plug in and play, and the green-screen monitor bundle retailed for a very reasonable £200. Amstrad's confidence in the machine (it committed to 100,000 units prior to launch) paid off when the 464 went on to rack up sales of 2 million in the UK and Europe. It may not have reached Spectrum numbers but it at least grabbed significant market share. CPC software was plentiful – even if a lot of games were ported directly from the Spectrum, *Manic Miner* included, naturally – and as we moved to the latter half of the Eighties, the CPC, Spectrum and Commodore 64 emerged as the big three for 8-bit publishers. Serious challenge soon arrived in the shape of the Atari ST, Commodore Amiga and PC, but that's another tale for another time.

Looking back, the UK computer scene in the early Eighties was a crazy mess, with very little direction and dozens of different machines all vying for attention. It was a time of innovation, experimentation and risk. For many computer owners it was also an incredibly exciting time; one that has never been bettered.



» To stay ahead, publishers had to release their games for as many systems as possible. Here's Durell's popular *Harrier Attack* running on the Oric-1.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Our feature covers the first half of the Eighties, but obviously the development of UK computers did not stop with the release of the Amstrad CPC in 1984. Buoyed by the success of the CPC, Amstrad launched the PCW range in 1985. The PCW was designed as a dedicated word processor and was very successful as such, although other office apps and games were released for it. After Amstrad bought out Sinclair in 1986, Sir Clive set up Cambridge Computers and released the Z88 portable the following year. This portable was a typically sleek Sinclair product.

Acorn shifted things up a gear in 1987 with the release of its first Archimedes desktop. Featuring 32-bit RISC processor architecture, Acorn's range of RISC machines built up an enthusiastic following and really deserve more coverage than the cursory mention offered here. The same can be said about the SAM Coupé, the 8-bit Spectrum-compatible computer that arrived in 1989 when just about everyone was shifting to 16-bit computers. No doubt this intriguing machine will be given the full Retroinspection treatment in a future Retro Gamer.



» With it's small screen the Z88 certainly wasn't designed for gaming, but nonetheless games were written for it. Including, you got it, *Manic Miner*!



» *Personal Computer World* magazine, which is currently enjoying its 30th anniversary, was launched in 1978 largely as a result of user interest in the MK14.



PANG

WE'RE FOREVER BURSTING BUBBLES



- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** BURST-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ FOR JAMMA BOARD



HISTORY

We all know it's good to play together. In the late-Eighties, Capcom usually encouraged us to kick the crap out of each other, but between the release of *Street Fighter* and its all-conquering sequel, it published this bouncy co-operative affair.

Of course Mitchell's *Pang* aka *Buster Bros* aka *Pomping World* (surely that should be '*Popping World*' or was there a fear that might make it sound like international erotica?) can be tackled alone, but it's far more fun to team up and blast your inflatable foes. Each hit sees the *Prisoner*-style bubbles splitting into ever smaller parts, bobbling against platforms and ladders, and threatening to flatten your little fellas, who, for some reason, have dressed up like retired majors on safari.

Strategies emerge as one player takes on a big blighter while the other hunts down a solitary bubble trapped in a corner. There are collective sighs of relief when someone picks up the clock that freezes time for a few precious seconds. Fingers are pointed at whoever thought igniting the dynamite was a good idea. Squabbles erupt when someone selfishly snaffles both protective force fields. Remember, if one of you dies, you both have to restart the screen. You're in this together.

Travelling across continents, taking in such sights as the Sphinx, Gaudi's dreamy La Sagrada Familia, the Acropolis in Athens and the mysterious carved heads of Easter Island, only increases this sense of it being a shared journey. And it's a trip that everyone can enjoy. I've watched expert Greg Mott set the current world record at the FunSpot arcade in New Hampshire (he kindly provided screenshots of every level for this piece, the big show-off), yet my seven-year-old daughter and I end most days with a linked-up game on our PSPs via *Capcom Puzzle World*.

The collection also contains the third in the series, *Pang 3* aka *Buster Buddies*, which has you blasting away against backdrops of great works of art from Van Gogh, Munch and the like. See, I told her mother I bought it to help with her homework…




TIME:
Ready

THE MAKING OF...

MEDIEVIL

Undead heroes. Cobweb-filled environs. A moody orchestral soundtrack. No, you've not stumbled into a Cradle of Filth concert, but the wonderful world of MediEvil. Damien McFerran speaks to the creators of one of the PlayStation's finest (not to mention most underrated) moments

IN THE KNOW



» **RELEASE DATES:** MEDIEVIL (1998), MEDIEVIL 2 (2000), MEDIEVIL: RESURRECTION (2005)

» **SYSTEMS:** PSONE, PSP

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

Videogames are fundamentally about escapism. It's unsurprising then that the vast majority of videogame heroes fall into archetypal stereotypes: muscle-bound and handsome for male leads or ample-breasted and stunningly gorgeous for female characters (Lara Croft, step forward). Bearing this in mind, the choice of lead for the hugely enjoyable *MediEvil* series is an odd one to say the least; the undead Sir Daniel Fortesque is neither muscle-bound nor suitably heroic. In fact, he's a complete failure as a hero.

When he was alive, Fortesque was a liar and a charlatan. He attained a position of power and influence in the Kingdom of Gallowmere thanks to his tall tales and fabricated exploits. However, when the land was faced with genuine peril, Sir Dan found himself pushed to the frontline where he promptly perished in the opening seconds of battle. Gallowmere's armies nevertheless triumphed over the sinister Sorcerer Zarok, and, afraid that he would look a fool for giving such a coward high office, the King decided to venerate Fortesque as the saviour of the land. Years later, Zarok returns and unwittingly reanimates Sir Dan's decomposed corpse – giving the pathetic knight a second chance to redeem himself. Game on.

Chris Sorrell, previously famous for creating the loveable aquatic secret agent James Pond (see **Retro Gamer** issue 44), is the brains behind the *MediEvil* concept and makes it clear that he wanted his game to possess a unique lead character from the outset. "We worked with a script doctor named Martin Pond, looking for more of a backstory for Dan," he says. "Martin made the brilliant leap that Sir Dan could have been a pompous failure in life whose reincarnation was his one shot at redemption." This distinctive plot – twinned with Sir Dan's unusual appearance – turned out to be quite appealing to some





» [Lynx] The first few levels serve as tutorials to help ease you into the game.



» Sir Dan leading Gallowmere's army against Zarok, moments before copping an arrow in the eyeball.

sectors of the gaming community, as lead designer Jason Wilson explains, "Oddly enough we heard after the game's release that a lot of women played *MediEvil* and they found Dan to be very endearing. I guess it was an antidote to all the macho videogame characters. Apparently Dan was something of a sex symbol in France!"

But the road to creating a videogame sex symbol for our European cousins – not to mention one of the most enjoyable platform romps of the PlayStation era – was not an altogether smooth one. Prior to the development of Sir Dan's debut adventure, Sorrell had endured a rather torrid time on other projects. "I was asked to help out on some new edutainment products that Millennium had just signed up to create, based around Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman* and *Father Christmas* books," he remembers. "Once these products were finally complete I think management took pity on me and rewarded me with the chance of making my dream game. There were a few ideas I'd been bouncing around for a while and in particular two sources of inspiration that I felt we could combine in a unique way." And what exactly were those two inspirations? "*Ghosts 'N Goblins* was one and the other was a love for Tim Burton's art style, as typified in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*," he explains. "Logically this led to the concept of an undead knight, who was christened 'Dead Man Dan' in my first concept proposal."

Sorrell and Wilson's predilection for all things gothic helped to shape the unique theme of this fledgling project. "I was very lucky that from the earliest stages I was able to work with Jason," explains Sorrell, who has thankfully put his days of wearing black eyeliner behind him. "I guess there's no denying that we both had 'goth' tendencies and we were equally excited to create a game borrowing from such sources."

Considering the humble studio size, *MediEvil* was an epic project. "Millennium was a small company with big ambitions. We needed publisher support to finance those ambitions," says Sorrell. "Consequently the first year of development was as much about creating materials to sell the game as it was building the design. Although we knew we wanted to make a console game, there was no certainty of which platform it would be on. For a while we thought we might be signing up with Sega – we even started work on the Saturn – but it wasn't until about ten months in when we met with Sony. Fate smiled on us and we had our dream opportunity of building the game, from scratch, as a PlayStation exclusive."

"WE THOUGHT WE MIGHT BE SIGNING UP WITH SEGA – WE EVEN STARTED WORK ON THE SATURN. IT WAS ABOUT TEN MONTHS IN WHEN WE MET WITH SONY" CHRIS SORRELL

Sony's support certainly helped to ease the financial burden on the team, but making the transition from producing 2D games to 3D ones wasn't easy. "It was a huge challenge," reveals Sorrell. "None of us had built a full 3D game before. Of course, since so much was new, there was a really gratifying sense of achievement as things started to function. I remember the first time we saw the textured 3D world running in game… it was moments like that which really brought our team together." Wilson concurs,"We were constantly amazed when we got a 3D object on screen or a texture on a cube, it was like we were unravelling DNA or something."

The fact that 3D gaming was really starting to come of age also helped the team. "During development *Super Mario 64* arrived," remembers Sorrell. "We played an import copy and were blown away by how well it brought those familiar Mario mechanics into 3D. *Tomb Raider* was another game that couldn't help but make an impact, and then there was the first *Crash Bandicoot* game that set such an amazing visual standard. We were sufficiently under way that none of these games really changed our plan, but they certainly helped us to

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

JAMES POND 2: ROBOCOD
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

C-12: FINAL RESISTANCE
SYSTEMS: PSONE
YEAR: 2001

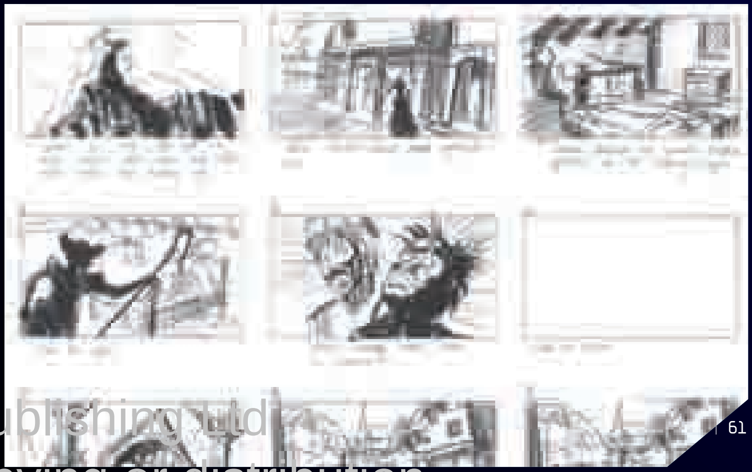
GHOSTHUNTER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PS2
YEAR: 2003



» The PSP remake was an admirable attempt to update the concept, but failed to improve on the PSone original.



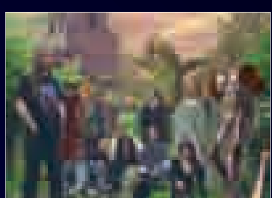
» A storyboard for the CGI introduction sequence, showing the dawn of Zarok's new reign of terror.



MEDIEVIL

WAKING THE DEAD

The act of promoting videogames is never an easy task and the *MediEvil* team had some interesting encounters during the development of the advertising campaign for the game. "For some reason our marketing folk were always wanting us to visit graveyards for developer photoshoots," explains Sorrell. "We got away with it a few times, and then there was an occasion where having set up all the cameras, a vicar suddenly emerged, pressing us as to why we were filming on church property. Knowing that promoting an ungodly game with a skeletal lead character might not be the most popular angle with the clergy, we made up some baloney about how we were a student group filming a documentary on local churches. Somehow he bought it, and let us continue filming!"





» Wilson: "In the first drawings I did for Dan he was tougher looking. He had a huge body and tiny head."



» The fabled 'Hall of Heroes' is a place Dan returns to at several points during his quest – the spirits within bestow all manner of useful items on the undead knight.

understand how we might solve some of the challenges we were facing in building a 3D action game for the first time."

Late in development Sony requested that *MediEvil* should support the (then) new PlayStation analogue controller, which turned out to be a particularly fortuitous event. "I was so glad when we were asked to include support for the new pad," comments Sorrell. "It was quite a way into development and we were certainly struggling to capture even a fraction of the fluidity and intuitiveness that *Mario 64* was so effortlessly offering thanks to the N64 controller. Once our new prototype pad arrived, it was actually really simple to hook up a camera-relative control system and after a small amount of debate we decided to make both analogue and digital controls camera-relative, using a weighting system to allow this style of control via the eight directions of the D-pad."

As development progressed, internal rumblings at Millennium caused Sorrell and his team some rather sleepless nights. "We were working very closely with Sony," he explains, "at a time when the portion of the Millennium team that had developed Cyberlife – an AI technology that was first used in the PC title *Creatures* – was rather more concerned with developing that technology than in developing regular games. They were looking to sell the 'traditional' games division. We reached a point where it was looking quite possible that we might be sold to a company that many of us thought would be a really bad partner." Sorrell knew that it was necessary to act in order to try to safeguard his project. "I took a huge personal gamble and arranged a clandestine meeting with our Sony producer. I told him what was happening, and that I could imagine nothing better than if we could finish development of the game as a first-party Sony studio. Fortunately, a few months later we became Sony's second United Kingdom development studio."

"IT WAS STRANGE TO SEE SOMETHING YOU LOVED BEING REMADE BY OTHERS. I NOW KNOW HOW DIRECTORS FEEL WHEN THEIR MOVIES ARE REMADE" JASON WILSON

MediEvil repaid Sony's faith several times over and was a massive success on both sides of the Atlantic when it was released in time for Halloween 1998. Sorrell is especially pleased with how it performed, "It was the best possible vindication of the enthusiasm and belief we'd long had in the project. It was especially exciting that SCEA were so behind the game, since this was an entirely European project with a very English sense of humour. For me, a real highlight was taking *MediEvil* to E3 in 1998 and seeing one of the official E3 shuttle buses emblazoned with characters from the game."

A sequel was inevitable, but sadly Sorrell wasn't as involved as he have would liked to have been. "I made a really stupid decision after *MediEvil*," he says. "I was given the opportunity



» Sorrell: "We had the opportunity to create a Japanese version of *MediEvil* – unfortunately Dan didn't prove to be the best suited character to that market… they were a little weirded out by having a skeleton as a hero."

» Can you think of any other videogames were you play undead knight? We can't.



» A pretty overview of *Medieval's* game world. Time to put your exploring boots on.





» Sir Dan purveys the surrounding area and wonders if he'll ever appear in any more games.



» We've seen some overbites in the past, but none match the sheer outrageousness of Sir Dan's.

to come up with a brand new game for the PlayStation 2 – which would become *Primal* – and I took it. I had a few new *MediEvil* ideas already scribbled down, but I moved onto creating the concept for this new PS2 project and James Shepherd took the helm on *MediEvil 2*." Even so, Wilson is full of praise for Sorrell's influence on the second game. "Chris came up with the marvellous idea of setting the game in the Victorian era with all the characters of Victorian literature," he explains. "But he ended up working on *Primal*, so I just ran with the idea with a new team which was fun, but I took more of a back seat in terms of design." Although he wasn't as involved as he would have liked to have been Sorrell is nevertheless pleased with what was achieved with *MediEvil 2*, "All told, I think they did a nice job with the sequel and I was certainly pleased to see it meet with further success in the market."

Bizarrely, the franchise bypassed the PS2 altogether. "Although the second one did well, it didn't scream 'must make a sequel' to the management," recalls Sorrell. "James Shepherd had the opportunity to create his own game and quite understandably took it – this became *Ghosthunter*. Since we were only a two-project studio, Dan's main PS2 opportunity had passed. Later in the PS2's lifetime I actually pitched a *MediEvil 3* concept, but sadly it wasn't to be."

The next (and at the time of writing, last) outing for Sir Daniel would be the PSP remake *MediEvil: Resurrection*, released in time for the portable console's launch in 2005. "By this time our studio management had changed, and although I stressed how much I would have loved to work on bringing *MediEvil* up to date, the boss wanted me to work on another project instead," laments Sorrell. "Given my interests and strengths I think that was a really dumb move. Don't get me wrong, there were some very talented people working on *MediEvil* PSP and they did an awesome job, especially considering the time constraints they were up against. But I was really sorry to see certain characters needlessly redesigned and frustratingly powerless to stop it." Wilson's involvement was slightly more significant – he supplied Dan's voice – but he too was disheartened with having to watch something he dearly loved get needlessly tinkered with, "It was a strange feeling to see something you loved being remade by others. I now know what all those directors feel like when their movies are remade."

Sorrell and Wilson have gone on to enjoy successful careers since *MediEvil*, but both confirm that they harbour a special affection for the exploits of the hapless Sir Dan. "I've worked on many games, but none of them have a place in my heart like *MediEvil*… it's gratifying that it is considered a classic," says Wilson. "Nothing I've worked on since has come close to offering the creative freedom and 'anything goes' spirit that characterised *MediEvil*'s development," Sorrell adds. "We were a young, largely inexperienced team that bonded behind a desire to make the most fun, charismatic game we could. All told, I think the spirit and appeal of *MediEvil* is a reflection of the crazy experiences and sheer fun we had making it. It's a sad fact that games just don't tend to be made like that any more."

BOB HOSKINS & ALIENS

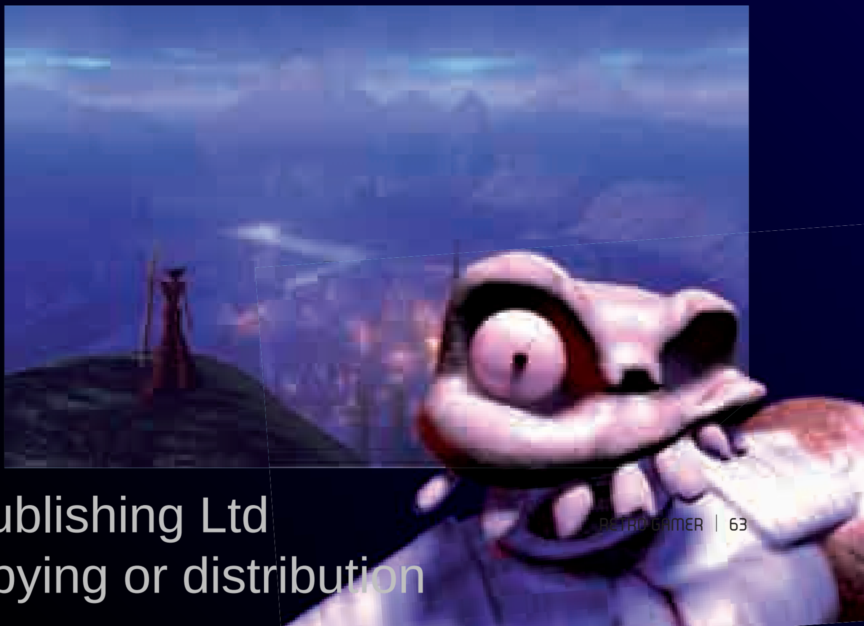
"We spent many long nights without sleep trying to finish the game," explains Wilson. "One night we were eating pizza and I was talking about my love of the *Alien* movies. We then decided to add a bonus level where Dan is shrunk to the size of an ant in order to free cocooned fairies from an ant's nest, and it would play out like a silly version of *Aliens*. But I didn't just want normal boring fairies so I decided they looked like a mini Bob Hoskins. So we made the fairies sound like gruff, bad-tempered, cockney gangsters. I think these days the powers that be would just think we had gone mad and ask for it to be taken out." Sorrell also has fond memories of this bizarre stage, "We already had more work on our plate than we knew what to do with, but we were so enamoured with the idea of a tiny Dan running around fighting giant ants that we somehow managed to swap out some other areas to squeeze it in."



» Cutscenes could often be very humourous. Obviously, this one isn't.



» A moody cutscene. There are humourous ones in the game. Honest.



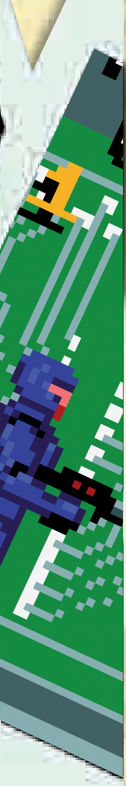
AN EPYX ADVENTU



THE SPECTRUM VERSION OF IMPOSSIBLE MISSION IN ALL ITS GLORY



TODD VISITS SLIME WORLD ON THE MEGA DRIVE



THE RISE AND SAD FALL OF AN 8-BIT SPORTS GIANT



AN EPYX ADVENTURE

From small acorns grow big trees and so it proved with American developer and publisher Epyx. David Crookes looks at a software house created almost by accident – and charts its growth into one of the world's finest videogame developers



» This image, courtesy of www.classicgaming.com/gotcha, shows Epyx's doomed VCR venture.

I*mpossible Mission*. *California Games*. *Chip's Challenge*. Make just one of those games and you'd be prouder than a peacock awarded first prize in a bird show and popped on the cover of Vogue. Make all of them, add a host of gems from *Pitstop* to *Electrocop*, publish such classics as *Barbarian* then put together a piece of hardware as technologically fine as, say, the Atari Lynx and people would be making wider doors in order to fit your swollen head through. That's if they want you in the room at all, given that you'd be bragging so much about your impressive catalogue.

That, however, is not to say that anybody at Epyx was bigheaded. Far from it. The company grew from humble beginnings and, befitting a publisher created on a whim, never quite got to grips with its finances. It had its share of problems, but masking all of those was a series of highly rated games, some of which stand out as being among the finest slabs of digital entertainment ever created by man. And until robots begin to make games without human intervention, the situation is likely to remain that way for some time to come.

Epyx was formed by Jim Connelley and Jon Freeman in 1978, the first game being the war title *Starfleet Orion*. A year earlier, Jon was working as a temp and he had met Susan Lee-Merrow, a keen *Dungeons & Dragons* player who invited him along to one of their gaming sessions. It was there that he met Jim, one of the group's two Dungeon Masters, and he decided to become a regular player.

Over time, the pair became friends. Jim, who was into his *D&D* role, bought a Commodore PET, which he used to help him with his Dungeon Master administration. But he needed to get back the money he'd paid for the computer and decided that it would be a good idea to create a game. He asked freelance writer Jon if he would help.

Over a couple of months, Jon developed and worked on its design while Jim took that framework and programmed the game in BASIC. The game was a two-player affair with a flaw – both could not sit in the same room and play. One would have to make their move, leave the room and let the other enter for their turn. It was good for keeping fit, yet not ideal for fluid gameplay.

Yet with a few weeks to go before Christmas, the title was ready and the pair set up Automated Simulations, placed advertisements in magazines and found themselves with a publishing company on their hands. They also discovered, to their delight, that, despite the primitive graphics consisting of dots for ships and asterisks for explosions, people were buying the game and so it was ported to the Apple II and the TRS-80. "The PET and the TRS-80 version was exactly the same, I think," says Jon. "Except everything was flipped or mirrored because the 0,0 points on the two machines were in different corners. I think the Apple version might have had tiny little icons for ships instead of just dots, but otherwise it was identical except for media."

A year later, a sequel, *Invasion Orion*, was produced, putting right the two-player problem of the original by having a computer opponent, but it wasn't long before they began to draw on their love of *Dungeons & Dragons*, producing the adventure *Temple Of Apshai* in 1979.

Due to the limitations of the computers at the time and also the *D&D* background of the creators, the game was rather unusual in that the numbers of the rooms in the game would carry a hint-filled descriptive entry in the manual that came with it. ("A droning sound can be heard," says the entry for room 4). But for Jim and Jon, the manuals were as much a labour of love as the games, often compensating for the lack of graphical prowess. The dots and asterisks of *Starfleet Orion*, for instance, were largely ignored by players, given the 34-page manual that came with it, mapping out game scenarios and storylines in detail. But with the advanced machines came the tweaks – a port of *Temple Of Apshai* to the C64 had better graphics, for instance.

DAVID MORSE

David Morse, the founder and president of Amiga and the former CEO of Epyx, sadly died last November aged 64. He had left his role as vice president of marketing at Tonka to take the Amiga job before joining Epyx in 1983, and he later helped form the 3DO company.

Morse left his wife of 42 years, Lorraine, sons Mark and Chris, and grandchildren Delaney, Julia, Kate and Caroline.

"David was a leader, a partner, a father, a husband, a friend, and he was excellent at all of those," says Dave Needle, the man who helped him create the Lynx. "I count myself lucky to have been one of the many people he helped grow in both our personal lives and our business ventures. This was a great man. The world needs more like him. He leaves a legacy of family and friends that will forever remember him with love and warmth and joy. I will miss him."

FREE FALL ASSOCIATES

Jon Freeman and his wife, Anne, set up Free Fall Associates along with game designer Paul Reiche, working on the *Pac-Man* clone, *Tax Dodge*, in 1982 for the Atari 8-bit system.

But although that game wasn't a huge success, a development contract from the then tiny, yet growing, Electronic Arts put the firm on the right path and, in 1984, the firm produced the hit game *Archon*.

Other top games followed, including *Murder On The Zinderneuf* and *Swords Of Twilight*. It also developed the *Star Control* series. By this time, Paul Reiche had left and went on to found the developer Toys for Bob.

Free Fall Associates is now Free Fall Games (the name changed in 2002) and the company continues to exist. It's website is currently 'under construction', however, and the company hasn't been entirely prolific these past few years.

EPYX



» Many of Epyx's later games ended up on the Atari Lynx including *Electrocop*, *Blue Lightning* and *Chip's Challenge*, as this advert shows.



By now, Jon and Jim were becoming impressed by the sales and positive reviews of their games. What began as a way to write off a computer purchase was fast becoming a career, and Jon continued to work on some of the era's defining games, knocking out *Rescue At Rigel* in 1980 and *Crush, Crumble & Chomp!* in 1981 under a new label, Epyx.

At about the same time – 1980 – at the West Coast Computer Faire, Jon met his future wife, Anne Westfall, a programmer for Disco-Tech, part of a civil engineering firm. She'd written a surveying program for the TRS-80 and was demonstrating the software at the Faire in a booth next to that of Automated Simulations. The pair dated for six months and Anne eventually began to work for Automated Simulations.

By now, however, Jon was beginning to get annoyed. Automated Simulations had grown so it could cope with the more ambitious games the firm wanted to produce, however, office politics were beginning to surface. Soon after, following some heart to hearts, a decision was made. In what a few analysts have since referred to, tongue firmly in cheek, as gaming's 'Yoko Ono' moment, Jon and Anne left Automated Simulations to set up a new design company, Free Fall Associates, together. It prompted some major management changes.

The new management tier at Automated Simulations, headed by new CEO David Morse, decided to rename the company and took on the branding, Epyx. More games followed, but rather than being based on adventuring, the focus was increasingly combat and action. Nevertheless, Jim still played a big part, pushing ahead with the strategy-action game *Dragonriders Of Pern*. But it was to be his final title – the management looked at the bottom line and saw sales of games such as *Jumpman* had far exceeded titles like *Dragonriders*. A fresh direction towards action was prescribed and Jim left Epyx, taking some of the programmers with him.

With the two founders now gone, Epyx ploughed on and 1983 became a golden year. The firm merged with fellow US company Starpath, a company that not only produced the most faithful *Frogger* conversion for the Atari 2600, but that had also produced the Supercharger add-on for the console that boosted its memory. Epyx took on Starpath's programming staff and the combined company, based south of San Francisco, was boosted to around 35 employees.

"I started just after the merger," says former Epyx programmer Chuck Sommerville, the man who later went on to develop *Chip's Challenge*. "I was from Sirius Software, which had just gone belly up and I remember quite vividly that the Epyx building was small, but that all the programmers at least had their own offices with closing doors."

Such small pleasures of working life must have been motivational. For in that year, Epyx's stature in the industry was firmly cemented. Not only had *Jumpman* been a major success, but *Pitstop* proved unstoppable and there was also a little game called *Impossible Mission* that seemed to impress a few critics, for reasons people just can't work out today.

Sorry, we jest. *Impossible Mission* was astonishing, blending skill and timing and proving hugely original and deep. We all know the famous line from the game, but that was only the quarter of it, programmer Dennis Caswell giving the

"IMPOSSIBLE MISSION WAS ASTONISHING, BLENDING SKILL AND TIMING AND PROVING HUGELY ORIGINAL AND DEEP… IT WAS A LESSON IN INNOVATIVE DESIGN"



» Another Epyx advert, this time showing just how large the catalogue was becoming.

industry a lesson in innovative design and producing a game that had a unique random level design.

The name itself is bound to have helped sales, based, as it was, on a switched around play on the television hit *Mission Impossible*. But such a recognisable pairing of words would not succeed without a decent game behind it: the agility of the running man, the synthesised speech and the rave magazine reviews combined to give Epyx a lift and set it up for the games to come.

"This was the best game Dennis Caswell ever did," says Chuck. "It was a breakthrough for Epyx, because it was the first they did that included voice."

In 1983, another big thing happened. A major deal was struck between Epyx and Geoff Brown, the 37-year-old founder of US Gold – suddenly the market for its titles had grown wider. Geoff had been on the lookout for a supply of quality American-produced games. "I had never been to America before," he says. "It was also the first time anyone from the UK had been out to see them. I just asked them for publishing rights to their games and they really had nothing to lose. All they asked for was a guaranteed number of unit sales in the year and sometimes a small advance. Getting *Impossible Mission* on board was a major coup."

The big name games continued. As if to prove Epyx had shed its *Dungeons & Dragons* past, along came *Summer Games* to coincide with the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. "I was actually hired originally to work on the port of *Summer Games* to the Apple II," says Chuck. "I went to Epyx because I was offered a job there by the ex-president of Sirius, Jerry Jewell, who had signed on as a project manager. Being able to work on a title like *Summer Games* was something special."

Created in half a year and running in assembly code, *Summer Games* was based on a Starpath decathlon game called *Sweat!* and the lead programmer

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Jon and Anna Freeman are still married and run Free Fall Games. Jon recently worked on development with Square Enix.

Jim Connelley set up The Connelley Group, which later shut down.

Stephen Landrum and Chuck Sommerville now work for LED Holdings, which produces environmentally friendly lights.

Dave Needle has retired.

was Stephen H Landrum. The unfinished Starpath game was dumped and all of the efforts were pumped into the new game.

Stephen helped Chuck with the Apple II conversion, created the game's intro and produced the diving and pole vault events. "It was the first time Epyx had taken on a graphic artist," says Chuck. "To have such a specialist wasn't part of what we did until that point. Before then we'd have people involved in all areas. But having someone who looked after the graphics enabled us to produce games that looked stunning and it wasn't long before we ended up with other specialists for other areas like music."

Selling over a million copies, it led to a host of similar titles. Within a few years, Epyx was the king of sports, knocking out *Winter Games*, *World Games*, *California Games* and many others. All the time the company was getting bigger, making around £5 million each year and employing up to 200 people.

"It was getting so big," says Chuck. "We had to move to 600 Galveston, in Redwood City. The building had separate areas for different groups. I worked in an area we called 'Left Field', because it was so far removed from everything else."

Epyx not only developed games but had become a major publisher of third-party titles, too. But it was not content with purely producing games and so work began in 1986 on a handheld console.

The company was a relative novice in hardware production. It's only real piece of notable 'hardware' had been the FastLoad, a cartridge that plugged into the C64 that was created by programmer Scott Nelson. Owners of the computer had snapped up the cartridge in their droves since it allowed games inserted in the 1541 disk drive to load five times faster than normal, and it also cut down on the hassle of multiple keystrokes needed to save or load files. It also had lots of special case code for known products on the market to sidestep some copy protection.

The new handheld machine, however, was a different kettle of fish. Called the Handy, it was proposed that it would be a 16-bit full-colour console and, with David Morse having been behind the successful Amiga and with him bringing on board RJ Mical and Dave Needle who had worked alongside him, it was a project all involved felt could not fail. After all, it had 4,096 colours, used the impressive 65C02 chip and it allowed for fast pseudo-3D games.

"I wasn't attracted to Epyx at all," admits Dave Needle. "When Morse, RJ and I conceived the Handy, it was Morse's task to build a corporate environment in which RJ and I could architect, design, build, and produce our new platform and the required system software, tools, applications and support structures.

"EPYX HAD HIT FINANCIAL PROBLEMS. AND THE C64 MARKET, WHICH WAS EPYX'S CORE WASN'T PULLING IN AS MUCH CASH"

Morse picked Epyx as our umbrella and installed us as the new team. Quite frankly, I'd never heard of Epyx before then."

A Handy division was set up. Programmers were moved into a cube in a secured area. Every summer there was a company party, with music and food. Chuck usually supplied the music with his home stereo and big speakers.

In 1987, however, the fun and games started to come to a halt. Epyx began to hit a rocky patch. It had attempted to enter new markets, not only with the Handy but with serious utilities such as a graphics package, and board games such as Head-On Football. It had also invested in VCR games, which failed to find a market, and had subsequently left Epyx's fingers burned, and it even created a joystick – the Konix-manufactured 500XJ. With so many thumbs mashing up so many pies, a financial collapse was looming.

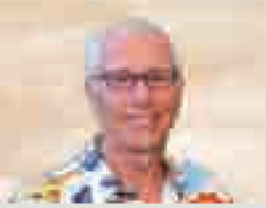
By the time the Handy was ready, Epyx had hit financial problems. The C64 market, which was Epyx's core audience wasn't pulling in as much cash and staff levels were starting to fall, from 200 at its peak to just 20. Some serious action was needed and so David Morse – having tried unsuccessfully to sell the Handy to Nintendo only to discover the Game Boy was about to be produced – approached Atari. A deal was struck allowing Atari to manufacture the handheld and Epyx to produce the games. Atari would pay Epyx for each game it produced and it threw the firm a major lifeline. Now it could concentrate on being the number one developer for a brand new system.

Yet it didn't work out like that. The Handy – or the Atari Lynx as it was renamed – became the death of Epyx. Atari put a clause in the contract that said any bugs that were flagged up had to be fixed within 60 days. Atari, however, would only comment on the bug fixes late in the 60-day time period, giving Epyx little time to fix them. The outcome? Atari would withhold payments, Epyx's cashflow was damaged and it went down the path of bankruptcy.

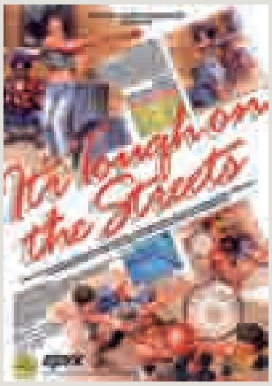
"It was a particular trick that Atari used," says Dave Needle. "In the end, Atari withheld payment for lots of the software until Epyx was in fact out of operating funds. Then Atari made a move to acquire the Epyx assets with no payment at all. The withheld payment amount was, at one time, $666,000. A coincidental, but interesting number."

In the end, Atari acquired the rights to most of Epyx's games, having bought them from the Bridgestone Group, a Christian software firm that had little need for many of the titles. But Atari itself went bankrupt and the firm was acquired by Hasbro. Infogrames then took over Hasbro and later pushed Atari back to the fore. Since then, System 3 has bought the rights of Epyx titles such as *Impossible Mission* and *California Games* and is re-releasing them on systems such as the PSP, Nintendo Wii and DS.

"Epyx went bankrupt because it never really understood why it had been successful in the past," says Chuck. "It decided to branch out in a lot of directions, all of which turned out to be failures."



» Geoff Brown flew to America in a bid to secure Epyx's titles in 1983.



» US Gold adverts like this were commonplace in British magazines following a deal struck with Epyx.

THE KONIX 500XJ JOYSTICK HAD A "GRIP WHICH FITS INTO THE PALM OF YOUR HAND", BUT IT WAS TOO MUCH OF A DIVERSE MOVE FOR EPYX



ANOTHER DEAL FOR THE RIGHTS TO EPYX'S TITLES SAW SUMMER GAMES BEING PORTED TO MOBILE PHONES



THE GAMES OF EPYX



STARFLEET ORION

(1978, PET, TRS-80, Apple II)

» *Starfleet Orion* was one of the first computer war games and the title, which launched Epyx (or Automated Simulations as it was then known). It allowed two players to engage in a spot of tactical space combat and despite looking rather basic, proved to be a lot of fun.

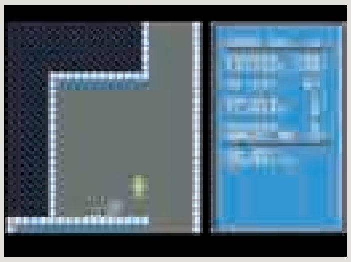


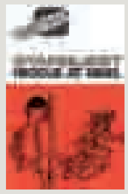


TEMPLE OF APSHAI

(1979, PC, Apple II, VIC-20, Commodore 64, Atari 8-bit, Atari ST, TRS-80, Amiga, Macintosh)

» As a lone adventurer investigating the ruins of the Temple of Apshai, this role-playing game had you seeking out treasure and trying to defeat monsters in a bid to escape the dungeon.

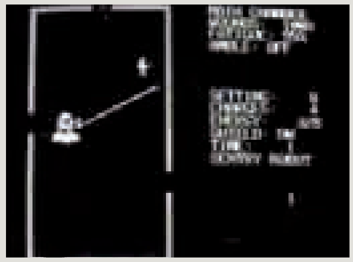


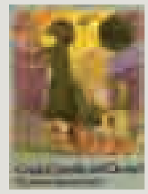


RESCUE AT RIGEL

(1980, Apple II, DOS, TRS-80, VIC-20, Atari 8-bit)

» Yet another early adventure game by Automated Systems. You played human adventurer Sudden Smith, tasked with rescuing ten humans held in a 60-room complex over six floors while avoiding the Tollah alien race. It's very similar in style to Epyx's *Temple of Apshai*.

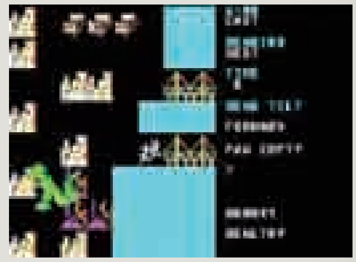


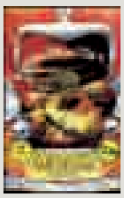


CRUSH, CRUMBLE & CHOMP!

(1981, Apple II, Atari 400/800/XL/XE, Commodore 64, Commodore VIC-20, DOS, TRS-80)

» Usually you have to battle against monsters smashing up a city. *CC&C!* was the first game in which you could control that monster, *Rampage*-style, with six horrors from which to choose.





BREAK DANCE

(1984, Commodore 64)

» Now this was a spectacular misfire. Effectively a "Street" take on classic electronic game Simon, Break Dance is a dull, monotonous game that's about as much fun as having your molars extracted. Let's thank our lucky stars that it appears to have been confined to just the Commodore 64.

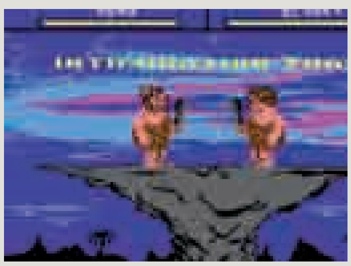


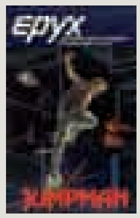


DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN

(1983, Atari 8-bit, Commodore 64)

» Based on the popular fantasy novels by Anne McCaffrey, this was a solid strategy game mixed with action that featured plenty of political battling and could be played by up to four players. Sadly, it was to be Connelley's final Epyx title.

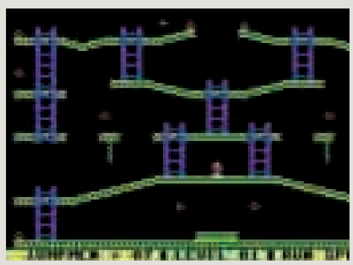


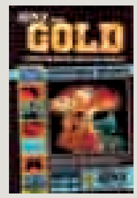


JUMPMAN

(1983, Atari 400/800, Commodore 64, Apple II, PC)

» Creator Randy Glover was addicted to Nintendo's arcade hit *Donkey Kong* and his obsession shows in this 30-level game – right down to calling the heroes in both titles Jumpman (later renamed Mario by Nintendo).

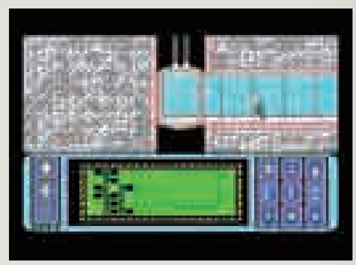




IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

(1983, Acorn Electron, Amstrad CPC, Apple II, Atari 7800, BBC Micro, Commodore 64, Nintendo DS, Master System, ZX Spectrum)

» "Another visitor. Stay a while… staaay forever!" Who could resist scouring Professor Elvin Atombender's underground complex for nuclear missile launch codes…?



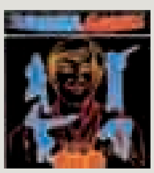


PITSTOP

(1983, Atari, Commodore 64, ColecoVision)

» Randy Glover did a fair amount of work on *Pitstop* but left Epyx before he was actually able to finish it. Nevertheless, this multiplayer racing game turned out to be a fun one with a neat interactive refuelling sequence that was pretty impressive.

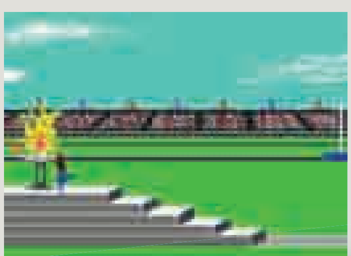


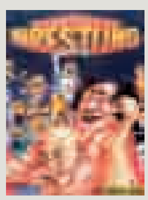


SUMMER GAMES

(1984, Commodore 64, Apple II, Atari 2600, Atari 7800, Atari XL/XE, Master System, Amiga, ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST)

» Epyx merged with Starpath and found it was working on a decathlon game. With the 1984 Olympics around the corner, the game was re-jigged and six months later a classic was born.

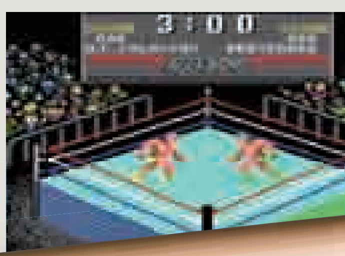


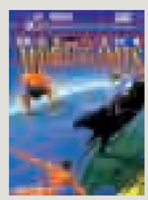


CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

(1986, Apple II, Atari ST, Commodore 64)

» Although a bit 'all presentation, little gameplay', the multiplayer mode was the undoubted highlight. Eight wrestlers, all copied from Eighties WWF stars, were available to beat your mates with and the end result was a surprisingly solid take on the genre.



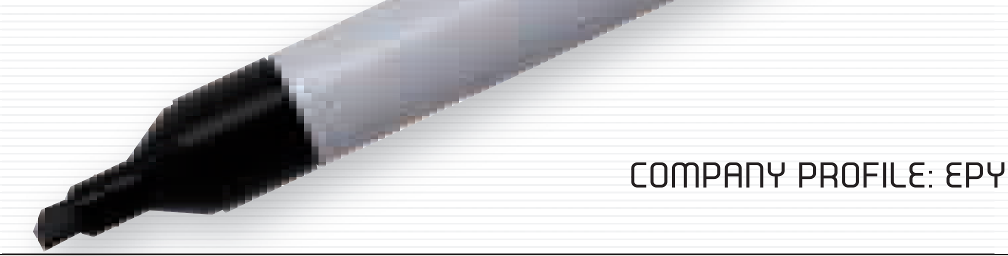


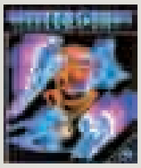
WORLD GAMES

(1986, Commodore 64, MSX, Amiga, Atari ST, Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum, Apple II, SEGA Master System, PC)

» You'd have thought Epyx would have no sports left to push. Then it pulled some weight lifting, slalom skiing, log rolling, cliff diving, caber tossing and sumo wrestling out of the bag.





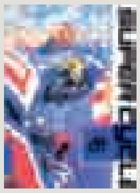


WINTER GAMES

(1986, Amiga, Apple II, Atari ST, Apple IIGS, Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum, PC, Atari 2600, Atari 7800, C64, NES, Famicom Disk System)

» With alpine skiing, ski jumping, bobsled, figure skating and speed skating among the offerings, all to the usual high Epyx standards, there was little reason to leave your armchair.



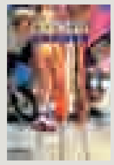


SUPER CYCLE

(1986, Amstrad CPC, C64, Atari ST, Spectrum)

» Looking very similar to Sega's *Hang-On* series (no bad thing in our book), *Super Cycle* was a firm indication that Epyx had shed its adventuring past and was firmly about all-out action gaming instead. A fast and furious racer that still plays well today.

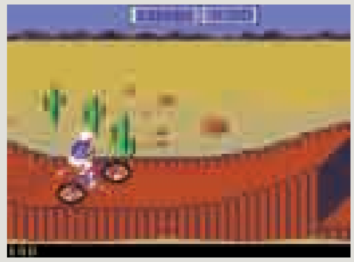




CALIFORNIA GAMES

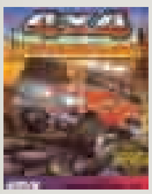
(1987, Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Atari 2600, Atari Lynx, Atari ST, Commodore 64, DOS, MSX, NES, Sega Mega Drive/Genesis, Master System, ZX Spectrum)

» *California Games* was the fifth in the series with six events allowing up to eight players to compete or practise BMXing, flying a frisbee, skateboarding, surfing or rollerskating.



IN BRIEF

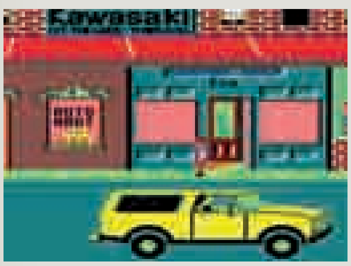
Dungeons & Dragons fanatic Jim Connelley buys a Commodore PET to help him run his *D&D* group. He later decides he needs to write off the purchase and so gets his new friend Jon Freeman to help him create a new game. They set up Automated Simulations to sell the title *Starfleet Orion*, and go on to create a sequel. When these games sell well, others games follow – including *Impossible Mission* and *Summer Games*. But the company becomes too ambitious. It branches out into too many areas. Bankruptcy looms. Can its handheld console, the Handy, save them?

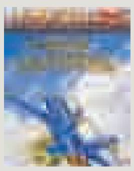


4X4 OFF-ROAD RACING

(1988, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, Amiga, DOS, Commodore 64, MSX, ZX Spectrum)

» Four vehicles were on offer with this cool off-road racer and all could be upgraded, too – needed for getting around the mud, desert, mountains and ice of the four different types of course.



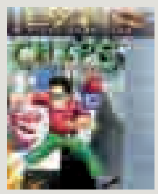


BLUE LIGHTNING

(1989, Atari Lynx, Atari Jaguar CD)

» The Atari Lynx was very close to Epyx's heart – given that it created the thing. And the developer was proud of military aeroplane blaster *Blue Lightning*, which provided hours of air combat fun. Effectively Epyx's take on Sega's *After Burner*, *Blue Lightning* featured a solid mission structure and glorious visuals.





CHIP'S CHALLENGE

(1989, Windows, MS-DOS, Atari Lynx, Atari ST, Amiga, Amstrad CPC)

» This tile-based puzzle game saw you play as nerdy Chip, desperate to impress Melinda the Mental Marvel. She made him work through 150 difficult levels, using keys, shields, and special shoes to bypass obstacles.

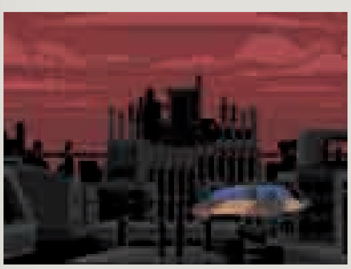




ELECTROCOP

(1989, Atari Lynx)

» Drawing its influence from *Xybots*, *Electrocop* provided a blast of tense action-adventure over 15 mazy levels, showing just what the Atari Lynx could do, particularly in 3D. A solid combination of blasting and puzzling that still holds up today.

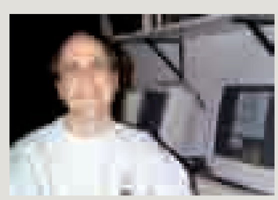




Gates of Zendocon was another early Lynx title, but sadly wasn't that special.



» Epyx also made the FastLoad cartridge, which was hugely popular and sped up loading times.

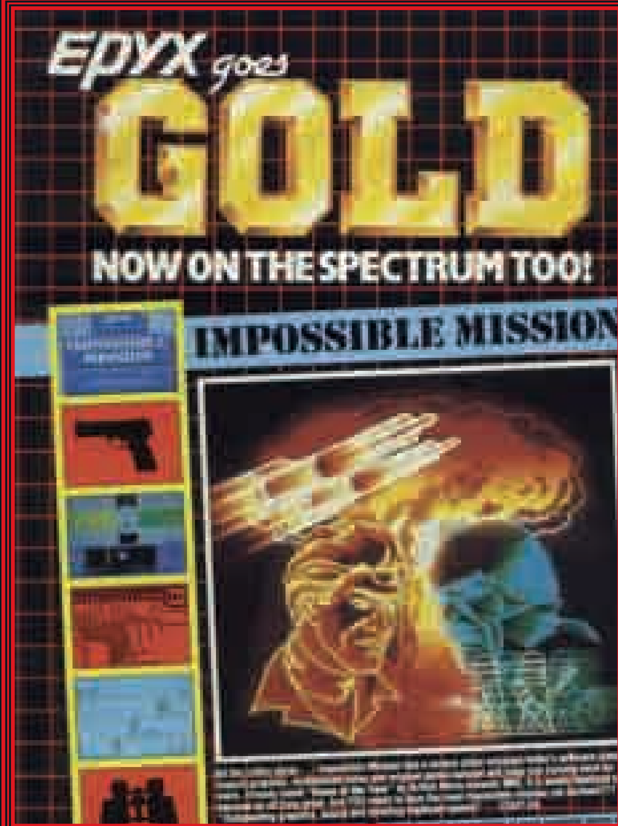


» Chuck Sommerville joined in 1983 and became one of Epyx's main programmers.

AN EPYX ADVENTURE



California Games Year Released: 1987



Impossible Mission Year Released: 1984



Super Cycle Year Released: 1986



The Games: Winter Edition Year Released: 1988



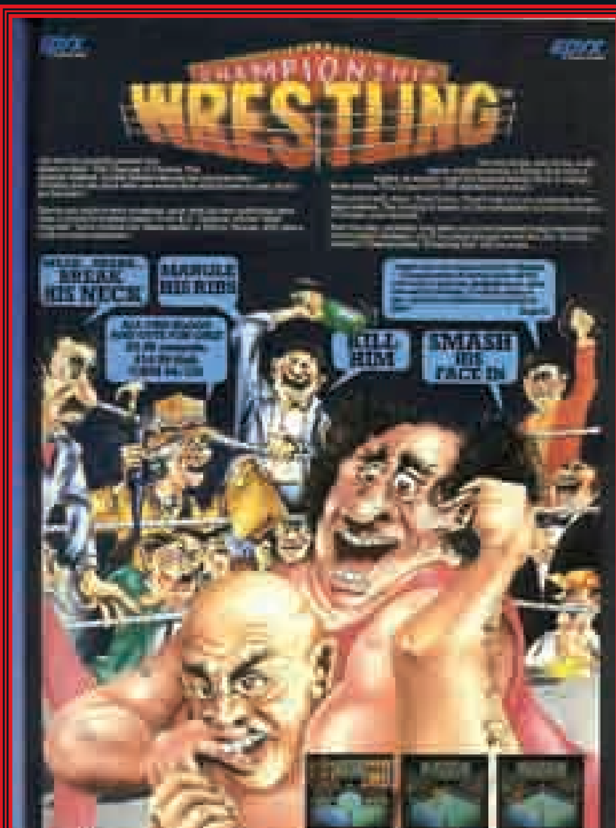
Chip's Challenge Year Released: 1990



Impossible Mission II Year Released: 1988



Winter Games Year Released: 1985



Championship Wrestling Year Released: 1986

THE 10 BEST RACING GAMES you've never heard of

STUART CAMPBELL IS OLD, AND WHILE THIS MEANS HE CAN'T REMEMBER WHY HE WENT TO THE POST OFFICE, HE CAN REMEMBER LOADS OF OLD GAMES THAT YOU CAN'T. IF YOU'LL LISTEN AS HE TELLS YOU ABOUT SOME, HE PROMISES NOT TO GO ON ABOUT THE WAR AND HOW IT ALL USED TO BE FIELDS ROUND HERE

THE 10 BEST RACING GAMES you've never heard of



When it comes to retrogaming, racing games aren't traditionally our beloved field's strongest suit. Racing games really came into their own in the 32-bit era, when the speedy processors of the PlayStation and the Saturn finally made proper 3D viable, and on first look it doesn't seem like there was all that much for retroheads to get excited about before 1994 or so. But in fact, that's only true if you have an incredibly superficial definition of what actually constitutes a racing game.



Around the turn of the millennium there was a paradigm shift in the genre (Man! I've always wanted to say 'paradigm shift in the genre'!), at which point it became almost impossible to get anyone to publish any game involving cars which didn't involve agonising, painstaking technical driving just to get round a single lap of the first track, adjusting your individual wheel nuts for 20 minutes before every race, and having to work for hours and hours to 'unlock' things before the game would even let you have a go on any of the fun courses. (Thankfully, there's a bit of a backlash going on at the moment, with your *Burnout*s and your *Full Auto*s and your *Ridge Racer*s back in the picture.)

But racing games weren't always such stuck-up dullard killjoys. In the old days, during the war when it all used to be fields around here, racing games came in a hundred different flavours. **Retro Gamer** 47 listed 25 of the most popular, but what about all the classics that snuck under the radar? What about all the games that influenced some of today's biggest names, but never get any credit for it because only three people ever played them? It's an outrage! If I was you, I'd *demand* that someone tells you about at least ten of them *right this minute*. Write to your MP if necessary.

> "IT'S A REAL SHAME THAT IT'S GAMES LIKE AFTER BURNER THAT GET REMEMBERED FROM THAT HALCYON SEGA ERA INSTEAD OF MORE DESERVING GAMES LIKE AB COP"

10 AB COP

■ **Platform:** Arcade ■ **Publisher:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1990

Sega's distinctively styled sprite-scaling coin-ops of the early Nineties – *OutRun*, *After Burner*, *Space Harrier*, and lesser lights like *Galaxy Force* and *Power Drift* – are endlessly lionised by videogamers, which makes it all the stranger that *AB Cop* has had posterity entirely pass it by. At heart a rip-off of *Chase HQ* from two years earlier, *AB Cop* puts you in the helmet of a law-enforcement officer on an 'air bike' (hence 'AB'), with the job of hunting down the scary alien monsters who are leading a set of motorcycle gangs. Armed only with a brief but infinitely recharging turbo boost and a limited jump ability, you have to ram all of the bikers off their mounts before the time limit runs out, at which point you get to tackle the giant boss head-on.

But while the formula is as generic as can be, the thing that marks *AB Cop* out is the sheer frivolous joy of it. The levels are fast, hectic and short, the bosses are mostly pretty easy, and the shit-eating grin your character turns to flash at you at the end of each stage sums up perfectly the 30 seconds of dumb fun you've just shared and the anticipation of the next 30. It's kind of like going round to *Burnout 3*'s house and meeting his dad, who turns out to be really funny and much more entertaining to be around than his rather po-faced wannabe-gangsta offspring.



It's a real shame that it's games like *After Burner* that get remembered from that halcyon Sega era instead of more deserving games like *AB Cop*, but then on the other hand you get the pleasant surprise of discovering it now, so everyone wins in the end. Phew!

09 CHAMPION DRIVER

■ **Platform:** Arcade ■ **Publisher:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1990

The close-overhead-view scrolling racer was an incredibly popular genre during the 16-bit era, representing a way of depicting complex racetracks and decent numbers of opponents at a respectable speed. There were many well-known examples on the Amiga, of course most of them were dreadful (*Overdrive*, *ATR: All Terrain Racing* and the wildly overrated *Supercars* and *Supercars 2*), but by far the best racer of this type was one of the earliest, and certainly the least acclaimed. *Champion Driver*, from Spanish developer Idea, is in fact perhaps the best example of this game type on any format ever. (The magnificent *Roadkill* was unfortunately disqualified on a technicality for having weapons, which isn't really what we're about here.)

It offers 50 tracks across five difficulty settings, from the gentle Formula Kart all the way up to the blindingly fast F1. And it also has a light smattering of strategy in the form of upgrade parts, nitro boosts and pitstops for refuelling. The handling is wonderful, varying as you move up through the formulae and featuring the nicest powerslides this side of *Ridge Racer*, and the enemy AI is unusually impressive for the time (which is to say that there actually is some), with CPU drivers who will weave across the track to block you and get right in your racing line on corners. There isn't really much more to be said about *Champion Driver* – the recipe is as simple as it can get, but it's never been baked as tastily as this before or since.





THE 10 BEST RACING GAMES you've never heard of

08 CISCO HEAT

■ **Platform:** Arcade ■ **Publisher:** Jaleco ■ **Year:** 1990

I liked this one so much I bought the company. Well, when I say 'company' I mean 'arcade cabinet', when I say 'bought' I mean 'won', and when I say 'won' I mean 'stole'. But that's a whole other story. *Cisco Heat* starts off with a fantastic unspoken premise – that the San Francisco Police Department are apparently bored of fighting crime, and have decided to have a police-car race through the streets instead. Scene set, it's time for a lightning tour of the city's most famous landmarks (allegedly accurately mapped), in a game that creates a sense of place that's rarely been bettered. (Another contender in that category would have been Konami's legendary *GTI Club*, had there been any way to play it or even get screenshots of it for the feature.) In fact, not until *Crazy Taxi*, a decade later, would a game so evocatively depict its setting – the same one, as it happened.

The technology of the time wasn't really up to what Jaleco was trying to do, but it made an excellent fist of it with what it had, managing to pull off even 90-degree junctions in a completely 2D plane with some aplomb. San Francisco's trademark roller coaster hills are wonderfully rendered, and the city is completely alive with incidental detail (fire engines spilling water across the road, upturned cars, trams and buses and taxis, even the famous fog) that gives it an incredible vibrancy as you hurtle through it, frantically honking your horn to move the traffic out of your way. If you were allowed to drive your real-life car without fear of penalty points or arrest, *Cisco Heat* is what it would be like.





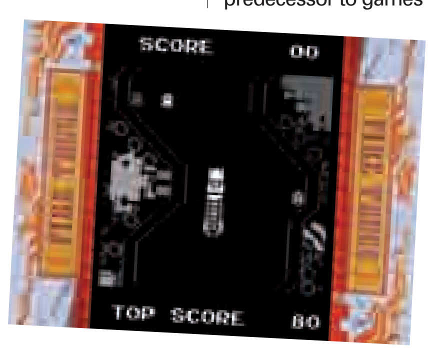
07 FIRE TRUCK

■ **Platform:** Arcade ■ **Publisher:** Atari ■ **Year:** 1978

For obvious reasons, most of the games in this feature tend towards the more simplistic end of the racing spectrum. But the oldest game of all has the most sophisticated and challenging handling model of the lot, and one which wouldn't be revisited for 25 years (in the shape of Sega's 2003 semi-classic *Eighteen Wheeler*). A follow-on from Atari's similarly styled *Super Bug* of 1977 (also well worth checking out), *Fire Truck* at once simplifies and complicates the gameplay, doing away with the constant four-speed gear shifting, but introducing the complex physics of trailer towing.

Driven on by the constant howl of a siren, towards a fire you never get to, and controlling a vehicle with no brakes and steering like a whale rollerskating on an ice rink, few games keep the player on a continuous knife edge of panic like *Fire Truck*. Forced to drive too fast through the obstacle-strewn suburbs to beat the 'extend play' time limit, with every turn setting your shredded nerves on high alert for the sickening 'CRUNCH!' of inevitable collision, gives the game a white-knuckle terror at odds with its sedate actual speed. And the sheer sense of achievement you get if you manage ten seconds without a crash makes *Fire Truck* stupidly addictive. An obvious predecessor to games like *Thrust* (as well as the entire *Drift Out* genre still popular in Japan), it was the first driving game to feature drift as a central mechanic, and may be the hardest ever produced. If you fancy yourself as a technical driver because you've won a few races in *Gran Turismo 4*, stand by to have your illusions burned to ashes.





06 SUZUKI ALSTARE EXTREME RACING

Platform: Dreamcast **Publisher:** Ubisoft **Year:** 1999

Well, if Metropolis *Street Racer* can make it into the 'Best 25 Racing Games You've Heard Of' list, then I'm having this one. (And also, I was going to put the excellent, unfairly ignored *Top Gear Overdrive* on the N64 in here, but it's completely impossible to get screenshots of, so it can sod off.) Besides – it came out last century, almost a decade ago, before *MSR* and earlier than many N64 games, and surely that qualifies as 'retro' by now?

Anyway, this glorious racer is a motorbike game that really feels like a motorbike game, not a car on two wheels. If you try to ride your various superbikes like they were cars you won't make it to the first checkpoint, swerving wildly from side to side and smashing into everything in sight. But grasp the fact that you're on two nimble, responsive wheels and you're in for some of the most exhilarating racing of your life – whipping through rock canyons and up mountain tracks, slaloming under piers on golden beaches, zooming down winding country roads bathed in sunshine or zigzagging through dark docks and gloomy city streets. The pace is breathtaking, the track design superb, the scenery beautiful, the handling/learning curve perfect. You may, quite simply, never enjoy a racing game more than you'll enjoy this.

Suzuki Alstare Extreme Racing has a gamerankings.com average score of 56%, which just goes to prove – if proof were needed – that most game reviewers are *absolute tools*.



"THIS GLORIOUS RACER IS A MOTORBIKE GAME THAT REALLY FEELS LIKE A MOTORBIKE GAME, NOT A CAR ON TWO WHEELS"



05 HOT ROD

Platform: Arcade **Publisher:** Sega **Year:** 1988

The clean, cartoony graphics of Sega's late-Eighties System 24 arcade hardware gave a distinctive look to the company's next generation of games (*After Burner, OutRun, Space Harrier* and the like all ran on System 16), as well as offering the possibility of a range of styles much wider than variations on 'stuff rushing out of the screen at you at breakneck speed'. Sharing the trademark rich colours and rounded edges with varied games like *Bonanza Bros, Crack Down* and *Scramble Spirits* came *Hot Rod*, an oddly shaped cocktail table-type arcade cabinet with three steering wheels around its edges containing a game that's the spiritual predecessor of *Micro Machines*.

With the same scrolling-catch-up mechanic and similarly cutesy toy-car-looking visuals, *Hot Rod* looks similar to other overhead-view racers but plays very differently. The better you do, the faster your reactions have to be as you get closer to the edge of the screen, and the game is very unforgiving of mistakes. You need to be either incredibly precise or cleverly tactical, recognising situations where you can grab juicy bonuses and crucial gas refills before you get zipped back onto the screen, and simultaneously avoid some especially tricky section of track and steal a march on your rivals. It's a game that's all about seeing what's on the next level if you play it by yourself (so you'll need discipline with the credit button if you don't want to ruin it), but multiplayer is obviously where it really shines.

THE 10 BEST RACING GAMES you've never heard of





04 CRAZY CARS 3

Platform: Amiga, ST **Publisher:** Titus **Year:** 1992

For some reason, only coders from mainland Europe ever seemed to be able to make racing games work on the 16-bit computers (with the honourable exception of our own Gremlin Graphics, creator of the *Lotus* series and also *Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix*). We've already seen *Champion Driver* from Spain, and it was only after some difficult soul-searching that the splendid *Vroom* by Ubisoft (France) didn't make the final cut for this list. Loriciels' early effort *Turbo Cup* was the *Gran Turismo* of its day, but it was yet another French outfit who came up with the Amiga's finest racing hour.

Titus's first two *Crazy Cars* games had both been awful in every imaginable respect, but by 1992 the developer had hit a real purple patch of form, kicked off by super platformers *The Blues Brothers* and *Titus The Fox*. There still seemed little chance of it suddenly getting the hang of racing games after the woefulness of its previous efforts, but get it right it did, and in stupendous fashion. *Crazy Cars 3* has so much going for it that there's barely room to scratch the surface here – it's a bit like *OutRun*, *Chase HQ* and *Metropolis Street Racer* on the Dreamcast all rolled into one. With a dizzying number of courses in a veritable cornucopia of settings – mountains, cities, farmland, seaside resorts, night races, rain and snow, you name it – police to avoid, rivals to race (with side bets for cash to upgrade your car), special challenges on truck-filled freeways and lots more besides, all wrapped up in blistering speed with vast draw distances, it was the fastest, biggest, deepest and prettiest racing game there had ever been.

And yet, partly due to the unfashionability of Euro-software at the time and partly due to the industry's relatively primitive distribution networks, it sold about six copies despite mostly gushing reviews. Even when it was rebadged two years later with a fancy official licence and a split-screen two-player mode as *Lamborghini American Challenge* it still didn't seize the idiot public's attention, which is a tragedy on a par with the Great Plague.



03 VIRTUA RACING DELUXE

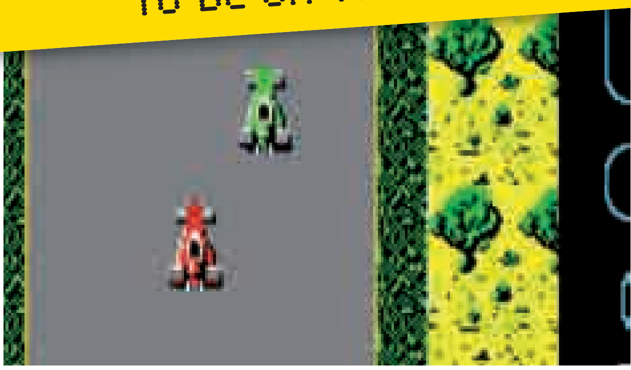
Platform: 32X **Publisher:** Sega **Year:** 1994

Now I know what you're thinking – *"I've heard of* Virtua Racing*, you idiot! Also, what ARE those weird flappy bits on the heads of chickens for?"* But while you've almost certainly heard of and played *Virtua Racing* (the original runs pretty nicely in MAME nowadays, so I'm told), the chances that you've experienced its finest incarnation are somewhere between zero and half of nil. *Virtua Racing Deluxe* appeared only on the 32X console, the inexplicable mushroom-shaped add-on semi-console that confused the hell out of everyone during the strange, dark periods of the early Nineties when it was released, and as a result *VR Deluxe* is one of the most unknown and under-appreciated racing games of all time. It's about 4 billion times better than the Saturn version that the company released a year or two later, better than the respectable recent PS2 remake, better than the tiresomely hyped *Scud Race* – better, in fact, than 99.23 per cent of all racing games ever.

In addition to the three superbly crafted tracks of the coin-op, *Virtua Racing Deluxe* adds two more equally well-designed ones – Highland, which is actually a twisting city/mountain course reminiscent of *Ridge Racer*, and Sand Park, a fast desert canyon where you expect to be passed at any moment by the Road Runner with Wile E Coyote in hot pursuit. There are also two new classes of cars to race in (the slide-happy Stock and the lightning-quick Prototype), but it's actually the restraint in terms of content that makes *Virtua Racing Deluxe* so perfect – the fact is, there is no better two-player racing game to be found on the planet. Sit down in front of the horizontal split-screen with a buddy for a five-race series (5, 10, 15 or 20 laps a race) and you'll be enjoying the purest competitive videogame racing experience known to man. The five courses all call for different skills, so the reckless flat-out speed merchant and the precise, technical driver both get their chances to shine, and you'll simply never tire of the beautifully balanced first-to-three contest. You won't even notice the pop up or the wasp-trapped-in-a-megaphone sound, because you'll be completely focused on hitting the racing line on the road in front of you, on tracks so memorable you could drive them blindfolded anyway. In fact, if there's a racer anywhere deep within your soul, you'll be in heaven.



"ROAD FIGHTER IS A GAME WHERE BOTH YOUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL REFLEXES WILL HAVE TO BE ON TOP FORM"



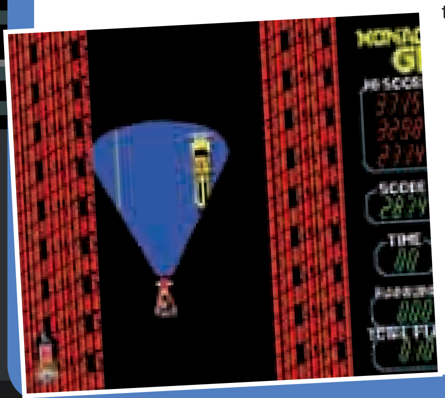
02 MONACO GP

■ **Platform:** Arcade ■ **Publisher:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1979

Alert readers will have noticed that there are basically two types of game in this feature. Some racing games are fundamentally about staying on the road, and some are about avoiding crashing into stuff that is *on* the road. (The most popular examples would be the *Gran Turismo* and *Ridge Racer* series respectively – in *Ridge Racer*, while it's possible to spin off the track, walls usually keep you funnelled down the course and always pointing in roughly the right direction, whereas in *GT* it's easy to find yourself sitting motionless in a gravel pit pointing back the way you just came.) And if you trace the heritage of the *Ridge Racer*-type game all the way back to its roots, the game you arrive at is Sega's seminal *Monaco GP*. (The ultimate granddaddy of the other type, incidentally, is Atari's *Sprint 2* from 1976, which oddly predates *Sprint 1* by two years.)

It might seem hard to believe looking at it now, but in its day *Monaco GP* was the pinnacle of eye candy. As well as being the first-ever colour racing game, with its detailed, varied scenery it was also the first game that people played just to see what was coming up next. (Videogames until that point mostly took place on a single static screen.) Through countryside, over ice (yep, another first – weather effects), into tunnels (with a fantastically inventive 'headlights' effect), across bridges and more, *Monaco* continually urges the player to get better in order to see more. (It has a unique system whereby you're racing against a 90-second time limit, but when you reach 'Extended Play' you have lives instead – with every 2,000 points you get an extra crash, therefore a great player can theoretically go on forever.)

But all of these firsts are historical footnotes, worthless unless the game is enjoyable to play. Luckily, *Monaco GP* delivers. It's fast, with super-responsive handling, and the constant stream of weaving traffic and ever-changing conditions mean you can't afford to let your concentration slide for a moment. It's a white-knuckle ride from start to finish, and as much fun to play today as it was 30 years ago, even if you never saw it at the time. *Monaco GP*'s timelessly wonderful gameplay is what retrogaming is all about.



01 ROAD FIGHTER

■ **Platform:** Arcade ■ **Publisher:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1984

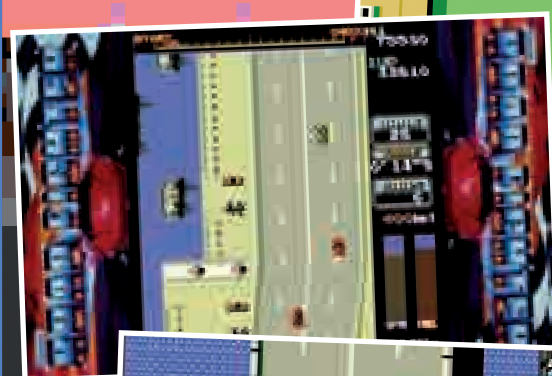
To the best of your reporter's knowledge, *Road Fighter* is the only arcade racing game to have been controlled with a joystick rather than a steering wheel, but it's not that quirky claim to fame that makes it so special. *Road Fighter* is descended from *Monaco GP*, taking its core values and refining them into one of the most challenging and addictive racing games in history.

On first glance at its control panel and tiny graphics, *Road Fighter* looks like the most primitive sort of obstacle-dodger imaginable. But in fact it has the most sophisticated driving model of its era – it's the first ever racing game to feature 'realistic' skid-handling, ie forcing you to counter-intuitively turn *into* the direction of the skid in order to regain control of your car as it slides across the tarmac after a collision with an opponent (you only blow up if you hit the side of the road, or a static or very large obstacle like a lorry). In other words, without *Road Fighter*, you'd never have seen *Daytona USA*.

As with *Monaco GP*, the big draw is seeing what's coming next, with six varied and pretty stages to traverse before your fuel runs out and lots of hidden bonuses to discover. (Driving without crashing for an extended period in the first stage, for example, is rewarded with a fly-past from an F-4 Phantom jet fighter and 1,000 points, while saving yourself from a skid at the last second before smashing into the side of the road can net you 3,000 more. I only discovered the latter while playing *Road Fighter* for this feature – 24 years after I first encountered the game, it's still revealing new secrets.) The road is populated by a wide range of vehicles – from slow-moving civilians who always go in a straight line and rainbow cars who can be rammed for extra fuel to weaving rivals and evil red maniacs who try to swerve into you as you pass – but if you're quick-thinking you can identify when you can use their various characteristics to 'pinball' your way through a knot of heavy traffic without having to slow down.

Road Fighter is a game where both your mental and physical reflexes will have to be on top form if you're to have any chance of reaching the end. It's as mercilessly addictive as *Sega Rally*, and for many of the same reasons – it's fast, short and accessible, and its superficial facade reveals more and more depth the longer you play. I've loved it for a quarter of a century, and if you give it a chance you will, too. It's the best racing game you've never heard of!





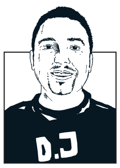


ALIEN STORM

THE LOVE CHILD OF GOLDEN AXE AND ALIENS



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** SCROLLING BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ ORIGINAL PCB



HISTORY

Like last issue's *Magic Sword*, *Alien Storm* is a game that everyone seems to forget about. Maybe it's because it's always been a bugger to get running properly on MAME (so we've heard), or it could be down to gamers not really warming to its *Golden Axe*-meets-*Aliens* premise. It might even be because no self-respecting arcade-goer would ever want to control a robot named Scooter. Hell, even Sega couldn't be bothered to include it on its recent PSP Mega Drive compilation, so it's down to us to make things right and give Sega's 18-year-old fighter a new airing.

Now, we'd be lying if we said this *Golden Axe* clone was one of Sega's best-loved secrets – it certainly isn't, by the way – but *Alien Storm* does have a certain affable charm to it. An icky, gloopy charm, granted, but a charm nonetheless. One of its key strengths is that, rather than playing as a straightforward derivative of Sega's popular fantasy fighter, it throws several curveballs in to keep the action fresh and exciting. Alright, fresh and different to *Golden Axe*.

While the traditional 'whack things with a dangerous object' premise still exists, it's now possible for your protagonists to enter certain stores and mow down rampaging aliens in a section reminiscent of Taito's *Operation Wolf*. When you're not spraying electrical appliances with hot plasma, *Alien Storm* enters shoot-'em-up territory and allows you to tear across sections of the beleaguered city as you chase fleeing enemies.

Technically polished – it was one of nine System 18 games that were released over a four-year period – with its vibrant, well-detailed visuals and some incredibly slick presentation, *Alien Storm* certainly had the looks to draw the crowds in. Despite this and a fairly competent Mega Drive conversion – the home-computer outings sadly weren't much cop – Sega never revisited the franchise, so it's hardly surprising that so few people tend to mention it nowadays. What a pity.




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THE MAKING OF...

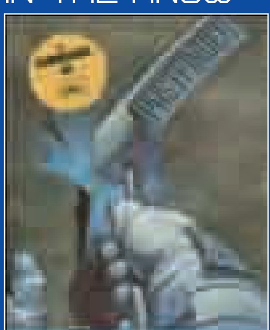
PASTFINDER

Activision's Frogger-esque strategic shoot-'em-up is probably best known on this side of the pond for its 'Sizzler'-awarded review in the very first issue of Zzap!64 magazine. Mike Bevan excavates some priceless historical artefacts with designer David Lubar





IN THE KNOW

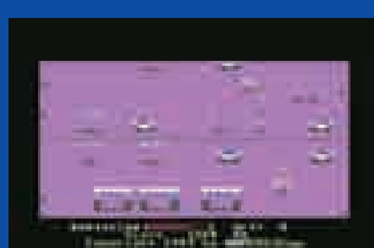


» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
» **DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
» **RELEASED:** 1984 (ATARI 8-BIT), 1985 (C64)
» **PLATFORMS:** ATARI 800/C64
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-10

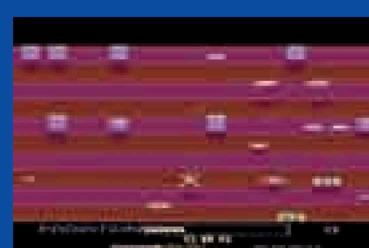
Amid all the excitement, promotion and press coverage surrounding the release of David Crane's *Ghostbusters* licence in December 1984, publisher Activision quietly slipped out an unassuming Atari 800 sci-fi shooter called *Pastfinder.* Created by programmer and designer David Lubar, the game cast the player in the role of an interstellar archaeologist, the eponymous 'Pastfinder' himself, a kind of futuristic Indiana Jones. From the cockpit of a highly unusual spacecraft (the Leeper), our hero's task was to traverse and chart the surface of a barren, hostile alien planet, hunting for artefacts left behind by a long-lost extra-terrestrial civilisation.

Although *Pastfinder* was David's first Atari 800 game, his fascination with computer gaming had originated mainly through another of his interests, which was creative writing. "In 1979 I wrote a short story which I sold to a magazine called *Creative Computing,*" remembers David. One of the first magazines aimed at home computer hobbyists, the publication had an unexpected appeal to David, even though he knew little about the subject at the time. "I got hooked," he says. "I've always been a games addict, and I saw the computer as a great potential opponent". Quickly picking up BASIC from games listings printed in the magazine, David was soon immersing himself in the quest to learn assembly language on his newly acquired Apple II. His first Apple game, *Bumper Blocks,* was later published in a *Creative Computing* game pack.

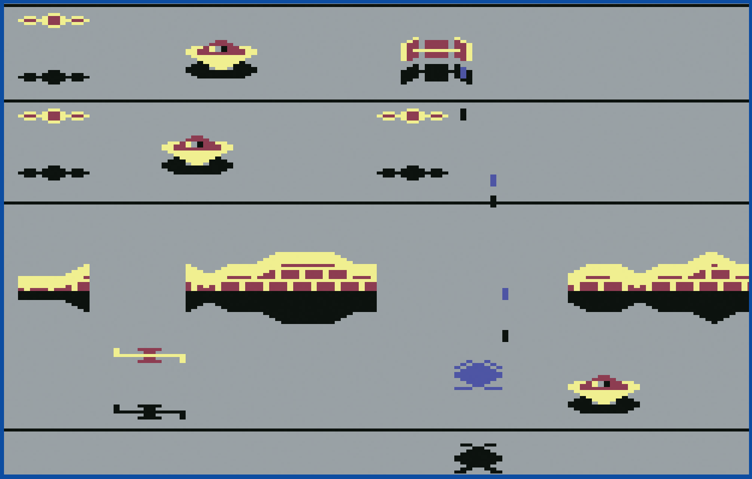
An opportunity to break from his hobbyist beginnings and pursue games design as a career came in 1980 when David was asked to join Sirius Software in Sacramento. Then mainly a publisher of Apple software, Sirius was setting up an Atari 2600 (VCS) group and needed programmers. David, now an associate editor at *Creative Computing,* decided to swap the written word for the hex editor and signed up. He soon got to grips with the 2600 and produced his first Atari game. "It was called *Worm War I,*" he says. "I came up with the worms because I realised I could make them move without doing any fine positioning." Soon after David had joined, Sirius managed to set up a licensing agreement with 20th Century Fox for games based on some of its movie back catalogue. "We were told we could use any Fox movie titles we



» **[C64]** The Leeper attempts to blast a tiny radiation-reducing 'crystal'. Note the disk-like 'artefact' near the top of the screen.



» **[Atari 800]** The barriers here pop up and down as you fly over them, a rather fetching effect.



» [C64] The blue spider-like Leeper in action, er… leaping.



» [Atari 800] Ducking the Leeper under floating enemies, while blasting others from your path is great fun.

wanted. As a science-fiction buff, I grabbed *Fantastic Voyage* and *Flash Gordon*. Altogether, I think I did six games when I was at Sirius."

By 1982 Sirius was struggling, there were rumours that 20th Century Fox had refused to pay around $18 million in owed royalties for sales of the movie tie-in titles, and blunders such as turning down the publishing rights to *Lode Runner* and Dan Gorlin's *Choplifter* probably hadn't helped either. "Our group, Mark Turmell, Dan Thompson and myself were still writing games for the Atari 2600," recalls David. "Activision offered to hire the three of us and set up a design centre in Sacramento. The 2600 market was already starting to disappear, so we were asked to design games for one of the popular computer systems. Mark started a Commodore 64 game (*Toy Bizarre*), while Dan and I chose the Atari 800. (Dan's game was *Zone Ranger*.) I was already pretty familiar with the 800 since I'd played around with it back when I was at *Creative Computing*. Beyond that, it offered better hardware than the C64."

Away from their former employer's financial woes and mismanagement (Sirius would implode and collapse as quickly as it had rose to prominence just two years later), David and his colleagues were able to concentrate on developing games. The main design motif of *Pastfinder*, the versatile Leeper craft, quickly began to take shape. "One of my favourite approaches to game design was to come up with an interesting animation or other graphic effect, put it up on the screen, and build from there," explains David. "In this case, I started with a top-down view of a spider-like creature, which was inspired by a daddy-longlegs."

"Our boss, Tom Lopez, saw it and suggested I think about a 45-degree sort of perspective," he continues. "I loved the way it looked, especially when I added the shadow. (I originally wanted to call the game '*Shadow Walker*', but that got overruled)". The unique control system David implemented for the Leeper, along with the nifty vertically scrolling, top-down angled perspective (similar to that of Andrew Braybrook's later C64 shooter *Alleykat*), sets the game apart from contemporary releases and gives it a distinctly original feel. The Leeper sprite, with its bizarre four-legged design and multiple animation frames, oozes character as it crosses the landscape, spinning and weaving through obstacles, and, given an upward flick of the joystick, bounds over any low structures in its path.

"I HAD A COOL CREATURE, BUT I NEEDED SOMETHING FOR IT TO DO… I REALISED THAT SINCE IT WAS JUMPING, IT WOULD MAKE SENSE FOR IT TO HAVE SOMETHING TO JUMP OVER" DAVID LUBAR

"So, I had a cool creature, but I needed something for it to do," he says. "I realised that since it was jumping, it would make sense for it to have something to jump over. That's where the real magic happened for me. How do you detect a collision when an object is jumping over obstacles with this sort of viewpoint? Obviously, there will be times when the Leeper is graphically overlapping an object but actually clearing it. Luckily, the Atari hardware provided collision detection for each colour of an object. Objects (sprites) had four colours. So did backgrounds."

David continues, "I realised that there would only be a true collision if the Leeper was in collision with the background object at the same time that the Leeper's shadow was in collision with the object's shadow. I wrote the



» David Lubar… plus cat.

» The original Atari 800 version of *Pastfinder*, David's first game for the system after working on a number of VCS titles at Sirius.



» [Atari 800] Later zones feature such dangers as opening/closing doors and these barriers that slide across to trap pilots.



PASTFINDER

ZZAP TESTED!

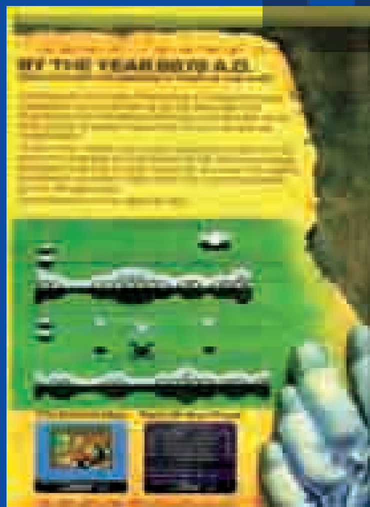
Pastfinder's Sizzler-awarded review in the first issue of the legendary *Zzap!64* gave Activision's shooter some well-deserved publicity among Commodore users and added immensely to the game's cult status in Europe. There was plenty of praise from Julian Rignall, Bob Wade and even Gary Penn, along with a competition with 50 copies of the game for lucky readers. If any of you won a copy we'd love to hear from you.

"There is plenty in this game to keep the hardened player going for hours. Don't be put off by the game's appearance, it has plenty in store and it takes a while to appreciate its more subtle touches." Julian Rignall

"You'll find yourself coming back to this one to avoid being a 'raw recruit' or a 'clod hopper'. I liked the animation of the spaceship and once you've mastered its movement it is highly manoeuvrable. I can't see what it's got to do with the past but I'd like more games like this in the future." Bob Wade

"It took a couple of plays to convince me there was nothing ancient about this game. It's more than just a good shoot-'em-up – there are some great strategy ideas. In my view, a very worthy addition to the Activision range." Gary Penn







»[C64] The expert use of shadows in *Pastfinder* adds immensely to the game's atmosphere.

code, tested it, and was thrilled at how precise the collisions were." David's collision-detection routine is pixel-perfect on the Atari 800 version of *Pastfinder*, and was something that proved somewhat challenging to replicate for the subsequent Commodore 64 conversion. "Tim Wilson, who did the Commodore translation, had to replicate this with software since the Commodore 64 didn't provide that sort of hardware collision detection," David reveals.

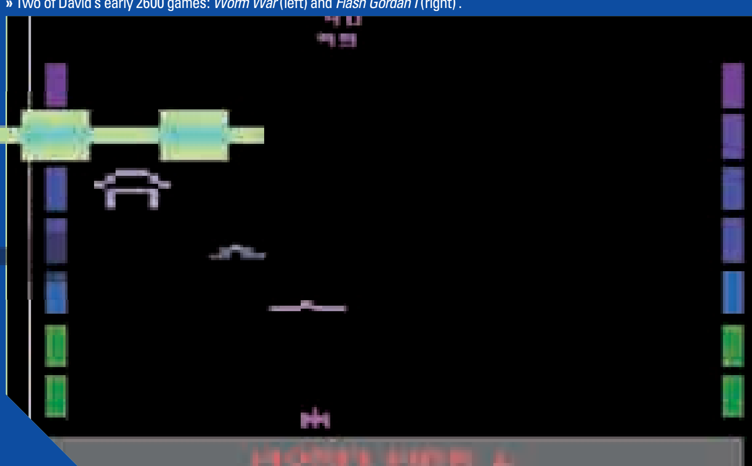
With its wonderfully graceful and rather balletic jumping mechanic, the game plays like a sort of intergalactic *Frogger*, however, it is rendered a more exciting experience than Sega's arcade classic by the clever use of a time limit linked to the absorption of harmful radiation during each stage. Racing against the clock through each level, leaping over obstacles and blasting enemy structures, while grabbing artefacts along the way, is a tense but highly rewarding experience. Striking a balance between speed, trying to destroy the difficult-to-hit 'crystals' that reduce your radiation levels, and avoiding collisions with the background is a fascinating juggling act.

> "MY JOB IS TO MAKE YOU GLANCE FROM THE SCREEN, TO THE CLOCK, TO THE WAITING PILE OF WORK, AND SAY, 'JUST ONE MORE...'" DAVID LUBAR

The game's explorational aspect, as the player makes their way across a 16 by 13 map-like grid of separate zones, tracking down friendly bases to drop off their stash of artefacts, and discovering increasingly more hostile terrain as they progress, was another great concept. It came about when, after designing the Leeper's animation and control system and the basic stages and backgrounds, David decided he wanted to add something extra to the package for players to sink their teeth into. "The graphic part was easy," he laughs. "That's one of the joys of programming; when you take an idea, write the code, and see it on the screen for the first time. But I definitely wanted to give the game some depth. I think my background as a writer helped colour my design decisions. The map screen came after a lot of brainstorming. I can remember being in that dismal stage where I had the basic game mechanics ironed out but knew I needed more and was convinced I'd never be able to come up with the right answer."

Fortunately, he eventually did, and the exploratory element of *Pastfinder* massively elevates the game above the average 8-bit shoot-'em-up of the period, and still remains a worthy reason to dip into the game today. With this in mind, are thoughts about a commercial remake of *Pastfinder* of any interest to David? "It would be fun if it got revived," he replies, "but I suspect it might need a bit more depth, and perhaps a palette of more than four colours."

» Two of David's early 2600 games: *Worm War* (left) and *Flash Gordan I* (right).







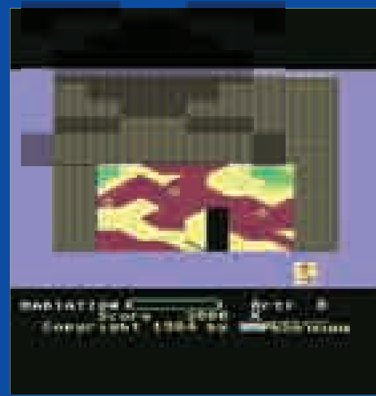
» [Atari 800] These floating cloud-like structures are much more dangerous than they look.

"Looking back, I'm happy with the general gameplay, but I wish I had added some sort of boss level to give the game a bit more depth," admits David. "I feel pleased with what I accomplished, however, given the hardware available at the time. A note for the hackers out there: I had to write a screen kernel that buffered the collision information for each lane, so the guts of the game aren't that different from an Atari 2600 program."

Pastfinder wasn't one of Activision's greatest commercial successes. The cerebral slant and surreal originality of the Atari 800 game didn't make much impression on US consumers. However, the C64 conversion, which followed in 1985, would soon gain some very influential fans across the pond. *Pastfinder* has the honour of being one of nine 'Sizzler'-rated titles in *Zzap!64*'s first issue, receiving 91% 'lastability' and 85% 'value for money' ratings and glowing plaudits from Julian Rignall and the infamously grumpy Gary Penn. It subsequently gained an even higher 'value for money' rating (94%) in *Zzap!* 48 when re-released by budget publisher Mastertronic. When interviewed in April 2000 Rignall still placed it firmly in his top ten C64 games of all time. These are all facts we at **Retro Gamer** thought it would be interesting to report back to David to check whether he was aware of them. "Wow! I never knew about any of this," admits David, somewhat surprised when told of his game's achievement in the hallowed C64 magazine. "I don't think the game made much of a splash in the States. It was released around the time of Crane's *Ghostbusters* so Activision put all their publicity efforts into that title. Also it was around the time that the industry began to go into a slump." Nowadays, the cartridge release of the game is one of the rarest Atari 8-bit computer titles, and copies are much-prized by collectors.

After finishing *Pastfinder*, David worked on a number of other titles for Activision including *River Raid II*, *Master Of The Lamps* and the Atari 800 conversion of *Hacker*, but these being third-party projects, his design role was stifled. Laid off by Activision in 1984 he continued as a freelance coder, working on Atari 8-bit and Commodore 64 conversions of *Ultima IV* for Origin, and *Where In Time Is Carmen Sandiego?* for Brøderbund. Other subsequent work included *Shanghai* (C64), *Home Alone* (NES), *Super Breakout* (Game Boy) and *The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp* (SNES). Notably and somewhat coincidentally, given the similarities present in *Pastfinder*, David was also involved in programming Majesco's versions of *Frogger* for SNES and Game Boy in 1998, followed by *Frogger 2* (an original game design by David) on the Game Boy in 2000.

Nowadays David has returned full time to writing, and is the successful author of over a dozen novels for children and young adults, the most recent of which, *Curse Of The Campfire Weenies* and *True Talents*, were published in 2007. However, he still has an agreeable epithet to share, gleaned from his considerable experience as a professional games programmer and designer. "A game doesn't exist to show how smart or clever the programmer is," he says. "The purpose of a game is not to frustrate as many people as possible. My job is to make you glance from the screen, to the clock, to the waiting pile of work, and say, 'Just one more…'"



» [C64] *Pastfinder* uses a grid-system to map out the various zones which the player must traverse.

CONVERSION CAPERS

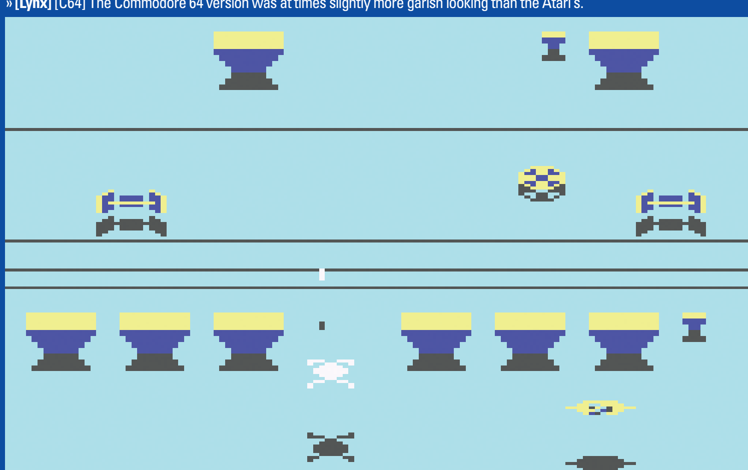
David Lubar's 1998 *Frogger* conversions, published by Majesco, have a special place in the heart of many Nintendo fans, with the SNES version being the final cartridge ever released in the US for the then-ageing system. The SNES version is also notable for its top-down 45-degree-angled view, similar to the one seen in *Pastfinder*.

The Game Boy conversion, however, was the source of a certain amount of head scratching for its unfortunate programmer. "*Frogger* was my first GBC game," explains David. "I had trouble with some of the colours. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't get the yellow as bright as I wanted. It wasn't until later that I discovered there was a protective plastic cover on the screen of the development system. Once I peeled it off, the colours were a lot brighter. By then, the game had already been released. So if the yellows seem too bright, blame it on my stupidity."

David followed up his initial remakes with an all-new Game Boy title, *Frogger 2*, with a new game design and added extra levels (such as Ice World) and puzzle elements.



» [Lynx] [C64] The Commodore 64 version was at times slightly more garish looking than the Atari's.



» [Atari 800] Approaching a friendly base to drop of my stash of artefacts. All three of them.



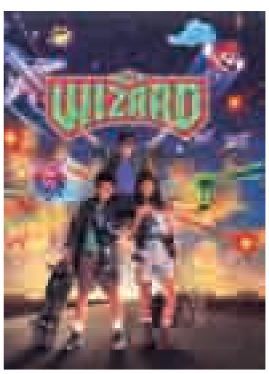
THE MAKING OF...

THE WIZARD





We know what you're thinking. Films aren't videogames, so why are we featuring them in Retro Gamer? What is the world coming to, we hear you cry? Ah, but 1989's The Wizard is a film ABOUT videogames! So permit Damien McFerran to take you behind the scenes of one of Hollywood's most misunderstood classics



» Fred Savage and Mario. Together at last.

T*he Wizard* is very much a guilty pleasure. When the film was released it was panned by critics and flopped at the box office, yet many people still talk about it in hushed, almost revenant tones over 15 years after its release. Although many critics will tell you that it's nothing more than a Nintendo advert masquerading as a 100-minute feature film, just as many people will talk excitedly about Power Gloves, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* when asked to give their opinion on this much-maligned popcorn flick. Here at Retro Gamer we fall firmly into the latter camp. *The Wizard* had a profound effect on us, not only because it was the first place we saw *Super Mario Bros 3* in action, but because it's actually pretty good, too.

Ironically for a film that has an awful lot to do with interactive entertainment, director Todd Holland isn't a huge fan of videogames. "When I was selling myself to Universal Studios to direct the film, I basically said that I hated videogames, so I'm the perfect director for it," he reveals. "If I can make these things interesting to me then I can make them interesting to anyone." Universal obviously agreed because within the space of a weekend Holland was at the helm of the new film. "I read the script on a Thursday, interviewed for the job on Friday, got the job and was prepping the film on Monday."

Holland found that he had little time to get settled before the cameras started to roll. "We were shooting five weeks after I got the job, which is an incredibly short prep for any feature," he comments. "The rush was all about Fred Savage's TV schedule for *The Wonder Years*. He had certain weeks off to shoot the film and therefore we had to start on time." Child star Savage was, at the time of Holland's employment, the only actor attached to the project and the new director quickly began to assemble the rest of the cast. "I hired casting director Mali Finn – later to become very famous for casting all *The Matrix* films, *Titanic* and dozens of other brilliant movies," explains Holland. "I met with Beau Bridges and convinced him, and then once I had met with Beau I was able to convince Christian Slater because he was interested in working with Beau, having done a film with his brother, Jeff Bridges."

Slater had just come off the back of the uncompromisingly bleak teen movie *Heathers* and was slowly beginning



» Holland: "Universal thought: Fred Savage and Nintendo – two things kids love. Let's put them together and make lots of money."



» Holland: "I concocted the Video Armageddon concept with a production design as close to *Aliens* as I could on my budget."

to turn into a serious Hollywood star. Holland is full of praise for the actor. "Christian was terrific," he remembers. "He liked to have fun in his time off and slept so late that he had to be shaken awake by a production assistant every morning because no alarm clock could wake him. But he was hard-working and a real team player. He and Beau really were great together."

Beau Bridges is a severely underrated actor accustomed to plying his trade in the shadow of his more famous brother Jeff. Beau had become a vital member of the cast and helped to create the film that Holland ultimately wanted to make. "Beau is the consummate pro," explains Holland. "He was the big movie star in our cast and really raised the bar for everyone. Beau always understood how I wanted the film to work on an emotional level. There were a lot of complex emotional layers suggested in the script, but the trick was to make it all real and keep it at the right level for a family film about videogames. No one was smarter than Beau about finding that level."

Although Slater and Bridges are unquestionably two big Hollywood names, at the time of production Fred Savage was easily the biggest star to be associated with the film. Given the fact that he's long since faded from the spotlight, it's easy to forget just how famous he was at the time. "Everywhere we went while shooting, everyone recognised him," remembers Holland. "People lined the streets in Reno, Nevada as we drove in and girls were screaming Fred's name and hooting and waving. Fred was 12 years old – he turned 13 while we were shooting – and I was always stunned by the grace with which he handled all of that attention."

"PEOPLE LINED THE STREETS IN RENO, NEVADA AS WE DROVE IN AND GIRLS WERE SCREAMING FRED SAVAGE'S NAME AND HOOTING AND WAVING. HE WAS ONLY 12 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME" TODD HOLLAND

The casting of Savage's love interest – teenage runaway Haley – caused Holland some headaches. "Universal had a Texas beauty queen-type that they really wanted," he remembers. "She really wasn't up to the role acting-wise. I had a fantastic young actress, whose name I cannot recall, that Universal felt wasn't cute enough. So we were at an impasse. Then seemingly out of the blue Mali Finn found this young girl named Jenny Lewis. Jenny was terrific, such a gifted actress and a great kid." Industry experts will sarcastically comment that one of the unwritten rules of Hollywood is to never work with kids, but Holland is very positive about his two young leads. "I had a really good time working with Jenny and Fred," he remembers. "Jenny had a very natural style that was very intuitive. Fred was more cultivated, having had years delivering 'emotional truth' day after day on *The Wonder Years*. Their blend of styles was very effective."

However, arguably the most moving performance came from the nine-year-old Luke Edwards, who played the titular videogame 'wizard' Jimmy. "Luke did a great job," comments Holland. "It was not an easy role. The backstory of his character was complex and quite frankly, dark. This was a boy whose twin sister had drowned before his own eyes. Savage's character is his half-brother, but they're separated after his Mum's second marriage ended in divorce. That's quite a mess for a nine-year-old actor to process, so I just tried to keep things simple and help Luke find the end result, without necessarily understanding the entire emotional context of the scene."



» Holland: "I still love the image of the that last giant door opening and little Jimmy appearing when you thought all hope was lost."

» The infamous Power Glove scene – villain of the piece Lucas Barton gives a demo of the controller with *Rad Racer*.



» The Palm Springs dinosaurs, which provided the backdrop for the emotional finale of the movie.

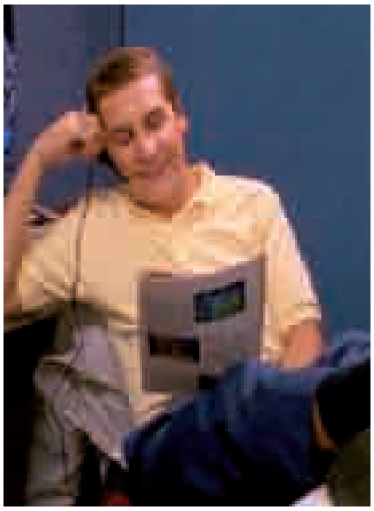


THE MAKING OF...
THE WIZARD

HIT THE ROAD

The Wizard is essentially a road movie, and for Holland that meant scouting for shooting locations. This in itself was quite a task given the distance the script dictated they should cover. "The small town in the film where the main characters live was Fallon, Nevada. What was hilarious is that in the prep stage of the film, we went to Fallon and I wandered over to the general store of sorts, with these old locals hanging out on the porch. I smiled and said 'Hello', and one old guy speaks up and the first words out of his mouth are, 'Scouting locations, are ya?' I did this double take because I realised how film savvy these folks really were. From Fallon we travelled to Reno, shooting roadwork all along the way. That was what made the film so exhausting to scout – you couldn't sleep in the van because every piece of road between one location and the next was another possible location."







» Yes, that is Toby Maguire on the left. Holland: "I had no idea he was in the film until years later. I just wish I'd kept his number!"

Amazingly, Nintendo was refreshingly 'hands off' with the film-making process, but as Holland explains, this was more to do with the era than anything else, "Those were more innocent times and it was still news to have a movie embrace such commercial elements. Today, no one even blinks at *Transformers* being a wall-to-wall General Motors commercial. We expect on–screen characters to be drinking Coca-Cola and using Apple computers, just like we expect Jack Bauer to dial on his Nokia-brand phone. That's just the way everything is done now, but that kind of product placement was news back then."

Regardless of this, Holland is keen to point out that he received plenty of assistance from the Japanese videogames giant. "Nintendo co-operated fully," he remarks. "Naturally they had products they wanted to promote, like *Super Mario Bros 3* and the Power Glove. It wasn't like we had to say yes, but we weren't complaining either. Those products fitted nicely into our script. We were, after all, making a 'videogame' movie, so, much like those General Motors cars in *Transformers*, we were a good fit with Nintendo. They certainly never told us to change the script in any way."

Arguably the most famous scene in the entire movie involves the infamous Power Glove controller, and the immortal line – "I love the Power Glove. It's so bad" – delivered by the film's odious villain Lucas Barton. Although it is now widely regarded as one of the most derided peripherals in the history of videogames, there wasn't a gamer on the face of the planet that didn't desire one after watching *The Wizard*. "It was a no-brainer to put the Power Glove into the spotlight, especially to empower our slick villain and put our heroes at a disadvantage thanks to his greater skill, knowledge and experience," Holland says. "While Nintendo never told us to feature the Glove, they did send a representative to the set to watch over it, as it was very top secret at the time. They also made sure we presented it in the proper light."

As is the case with all feature films, it wasn't smooth running all of the time. In fact, Holland had several major issues to deal with during the production of the movie – the script being the most concerning. "The script was way too long," explains Holland. "I argued with the studio that we were shooting way too much footage – more than we could ever possibly use – and that just makes everything harder and is incredibly wasteful. But I was a young nobody. I lost the argument and was told flat out by Universal to shoot the entire script." Holland had the last laugh, but it was a hollow victory for the director. "The first assembly of all the footage was two-and-a-half hours long. I ended up cutting an hour out of the film for my director's cut just to reach a length suitable for a family film."

"NINTENDO HAD PRODUCTS IT WANTED TO PROMOTE, LIKE SUPER MARIO BROS 3 AND THE POWER GLOVE, THAT FITTED NICELY INTO OUR SCRIPT" TODD HOLLAND

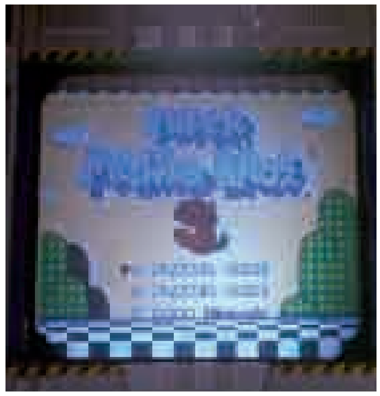
» Jimmy does his thing at Video Armageddon. Note the lunchbox between his legs as he plays – this seemingly insignificant item would prove to be integral to Holland's revisited storyline.







» Holland: "The Video Armageddon interiors were all shot at Cal Arts University in their big modular auditorium."



» *The Wizard* was the first place that many gamers saw *Super Mario Bros 3* in action

The quality of the script also created problems. "I liked it when I first read it," recalls Holland. "But I always wanted more. I pushed for a lot of changes. In the original script, Jimmy wanders for no reason and he never says anything to anyone. I wanted Jimmy to have a secret purpose. All he really wanted was to take his dead sister's remains – that lunchbox full of her stuff and pictures of their family – back to the last place he could remember them all being happy together. I decided that that place would be these full-scale replica dinosaurs on the freeway outside Palm Springs. The family would learn the truth, and come to a new understanding and appreciation of Jimmy as a deeply wounded boy desperately needing to do one last thing for his dead sister in order to find closure for his grief. And from this emotional catharsis, all their wounds as a broken family could begin to be rebuilt."

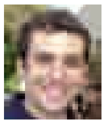
Holland's proposed rewrite was tentatively approved but it wasn't the end to the tension that surrounded the production of the film. "My relationship with the producer and Universal fell apart," he laments. "I'd argued too loudly and from there it all went downhill. It was one fight after another. There was enormous mistrust all around. I had lost all support with the writer, producer and studio."

This mistrust led to many on-set battles and eventually culminated in the final scene being hastily reworked by Holland. By this stage Universal had expressed doubts about the script rewrites and had informed the director that much of his new material would be cut once filming had been completed. Amazingly, the poignant and moving final scene, where Jimmy puts the memory of his dead sister to rest, was written by the director the night before it was shot and never got the approval of the producers or the studio. "I had the only copy of the revised text – because I had written it the night before – and so I just told each of the actors what to say in rehearsal. That is what we shot and that is the ending of the film as it exists today." The gamble paid off as test audiences reacted extremely positively to the more emotional plot line and the tear-jerking final scene inside the hollow interior of the Palm Springs dinosaur. "There was never another attack on that storyline after my first director's cut preview of the film," comments Holland with a wry grin.

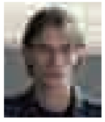
Sadly, for all Holland's effort and despite the considerable pulling power of both Fred Savage and the Nintendo brand, the film wasn't the financial success that Universal had hoped for. "It cost $6 million to make, a low budget even then," says Holland. "It made $13 million at the box office, but everyone was expecting that 'Fred Savage/Nintendo – how can we lose?' equation to pay off big time, so $13 million was a huge disappointment. I couldn't get a job for seven months after that."

His film may have been critically attacked and flopped at the box office, but Holland nevertheless harbours fond memories of making the *The Wizard*. "I loved my cast," he says with a smile. "We really had fun together." But does the director still maintain his indifference to videogames? "I asked for an Xbox 360 last Christmas as I was really hooked on the TV ads for *Gears Of War*, but I'm really busy with work and I have to confess I never have time to play, so I totally suck at it."

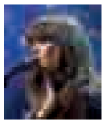
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Fred Savage (Corey Woods) – Now working as a fully fledged director of film and television productions. Savage's directorial movie debut was 2007's *Daddy Day Camp*.



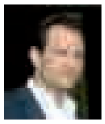
Luke Edwards (Jimmy Woods) – Still working as an actor, Luke has appeared in numerous television roles as well as 2003's *Jeepers Creepers 2*.



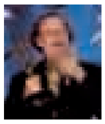
Jenny Lewis (Haley) – After leaving the acting profession in 2001, Lewis now fronts the successful American indie-rock band Rilo Kiley.



Beau Bridges (Sam Woods) – Since 1989 Beau has appeared in more films and television shows than you've had hot dinners, and is still well worth watching.



Christian Slater (Nick Woods) – Slater has struggled with alcohol and drug problems over the past decade. One of his recent films was the lamentable *Alone In The Dark*.



Todd Holland (Director) – Holland continues to direct movies and television shows, and has been involved with *Malcolm In The Middle*, *The Larry Sanders Show* and *Friends*.

» Holland chews the fat with Slater and Bridges during the amusing motel scene.



» Due to Nintendo's involvement, the majority of the games shown in the film were NES releases.



RETRORATED



OMEGA FIVE



» The many bosses you face are not only spectacular to look at, but feature extremely inventive attack patterns.

INFORMATION

» **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE

» **COST:** 800 POINTS

» **60 HERTZ?:** YES

Put your hands up if you remember Capcom's *Forgotten Worlds*. One, two. Good, quite a few of you then. Well you may want to head on over to Xbox Live Arcade rather sharpish, as Natsume and Hudson's new shooter is as fitting a tribute as you're ever likely to find on Microsoft's console or any other for that matter.

Using the now familiar 'one stick to move, the other to fire' mechanism that virtually every shoot-'em-up on Live Arcade now appears to employ, *Omega Five* is an utterly sublime blaster that takes all the best bits from Capcom's superb shooter and adds plenty of its own magic to create a shockingly good blaster that constantly draws you back for one more go.

Taking control of one of four – two of which are unlockable – characters, you're required to do little more than fly through the ridiculously detailed stages and amass as many points as possible.



» Look how good *Omega Five* is Capcom. Now remake *Forgotten Worlds* so that it looks even better than this. Go on, you know you want to.



» Bullets initially appear to be incredibly hard to dodge, but once you've worked out your hitbox you'll discover that *Omega Five* gets far, far easier.

Of course there's a little more too it than that (not a lot mind) but *Omega Five* is a score-based shooter first and foremost and a bloody good one as well.

Once you get past the initial jaw-dropping visuals, which are easily some of the best that Live Arcade has to offer, you may start off feeling disappointment or even loathing, mainly because your main character is so large.

As with many shooters though it's all illusionary and they actually have pretty tiny hitboxes, meaning that as long as a certain area isn't breached you can brush against or even pass through most bullets without the fear of losing a precious life. Once you've learned the parameters of your hitbox the once-cramped levels immediately open up and allow you to become far more daring in the way you approach each of the four stages.

Having just a quartet of levels to work your way through may not sound impressive, but Natsume and Hudson Soft realise that replay value in shoot-'em-ups is king and as a result have added plenty of



» As you can see from this screen, the graphics are gorgeous. However, you can't see just how good *Omega Five*'s soundtrack is so you'll just have to take our word for it.



» If you like difficult shooters, then this is definitely the game for you.

decent unlockables to ensure that you'll be constantly returning to this meticulously built blaster. Once a stage (and eventually the game) has been completed (no small task in itself) you'll unlock several decent extras including, new characters, tougher challenge modes and the insanely hard Arcade++ mode, which dispenses with your character's generous life bar so that a single hit from a bullet kills you.

Of course, even all these generous extras would amount to nothing if the main game itself was rubbish, but this is far from the case. As well as looking incredible, the four levels of *Omega Five* are brilliantly designed and feature an amazing amount of diversity, both in the actual environments and their actual structure. The score system has also been finely honed – constantly destroying enemies raises a multiplier – so you'll soon start learning the level layouts so you can twist it to your own advantage. Perhaps best of all though is the fact that playing the challenge levels automatically saves your performance, which is then uploaded to Xbox Live. It's a great idea, which allows you to observe the progress of other players and plan your own strategies accordingly.

There will no doubt be a lot of people out there who are put off by *Omega Five*'s rather high difficulty level and (seemingly) its lack of longevity, but to miss out on this wonderful shooter really would be a crime against gaming. Let's just hope that we see more efforts like this very soon.

PRESENTATION: 91% Slickly designed, plenty of options and a whole host of extras to unlock.

AESTHETICS: 96% *Omega Five* not only boasts scintillating visuals, but has a thumpingly good score that will make your toes curl with delight.

PLAYABILITY: 85% Despite the easiness of the controls, *Omega Five* is reasonably tough to get to grips with. Once it all clicks however...

LONGEVITY: 88% Four levels may sound paltry, but the amount of replay value on offer here is astonishing.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 92% We'd happily pay £40 if this were the latest Dreamcast shooter. The fact it's around six pounds really boggles the mind.

OVERALL: 91%

ALIEN STORM

INFORMATION

- **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
- **COST:** 800 POINTS
- **60 HERTZ?:** NO

Sega has been a staunch supporter of the Virtual Console and it's released over 40 games since the Wii's debut. It's been a bit quiet of late though, and as we went to press, *Alien Storm* has been its only release since the beginning of the year.

Still, there are far worse titles it could have chosen, and while this perfectly competent Mega Drive conversion isn't the best example of the genre, there are far worse ways to blow 800 points.

Essentially playing like a sci-fi version of *Golden Axe*, *Alien Storm* is a one or two-player romp – the original arcade machine supported three players at the same time – that has you and a buddy cleaning up the streets by eliminating all the alien scum. There's a little more information about the arcade original on page 78, so we'll just look at how this Mega Drive version fares.

In all honesty, it's actually pretty good fun. It's certainly not as arcade perfect as was originally suggested, and the tinny soundtrack is unlikely to win it any new fans, but this is easily the best home conversion we've ever played. Granted, the levels have been greatly cut down and the sprites look nowhere near as polished as they did in 1991, but the gameplay is still intact, and while it's been superseded by titles like *Streets Of Rage 2* it's still enjoyable to play.

In fact, the only real issue with this release is that it's arrived on the system a little too late for its own good. With the superior *Golden Axe* and *Streets Of Rage 2* already available, a purchase will depend on how much you like the sci-fi setting.



» It may only cost about five pounds, but with brilliant games like *Golden Axe* and *Streets Of Rage 2* available, there are better places to spend those points.



» In all honesty, it doesn't look particularly good, however, it is a reasonably enjoyable game to play.

PRESENTATION: 72% There are quite a few different options and all the menus are nicely presented.

AESTHETICS: 65% It's an utterly generic game, but the deviation into other gameplay modes makes *Alien Storm* fairly enjoyable.

PLAYABILITY: 75% The controls take a while to get used to, but the actual gameplay is sublime. Especially if you use the Classic Controller.

LONGEVITY: 58% It's not going to take very long to finish and once completed there's little reason to return to it.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 65% It's certainly a decent buy at just over a fiver, but there are far better examples of the genre already available.

OVERALL: 66%

RETRORATED

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» We were close to including this instead of *Turbo* in the Top 25, but seeing as *3rd Strike* made number one we were worried that *Turbo* fans would combust with rage.

INFORMATION

» **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **COST:** 800 POINTS
» **60 HERTZ?:** YES

If we were Capcom's cherished *Street Fighter* franchise our udders would be feeling mighty sore right now. The Wii has only been available for a little over a year and we're already on our third variation of *Street Fighter II* for the SNES. Still, the good news is that unless the Japan and US exclusive *Street Fighter Alpha II* gets released, this will be the last one you have to purchase and that means Nintendo has saved the best version for last.

Granted, it lacks the insane speed of *Street Fighter II Turbo*, but this latest offering is arguably just as good in terms of balance and extras.

Of course, the new prefix should tell you the most important news; this is the SNES outing that finally featured newcomers Cammy, T Hawk, Dee Jay and Fei Long, bringing the total roster of playable characters up to 16. Balance between the fighters has also been adjusted, and while the focus is clearly on the new guys, many of the original pugilists have received slight gameplay tweaks, meaning that there's plenty of reasons to return to old stalwarts like Dhalsim and Zangief. Interestingly, *The New Challengers* also marks the first time that there was a notable difference between the power of Ken and Ryu. Where they once spookily mirrored each other, they now have distinctive new flaming moves – a fireball for Ryu, a dragon punch for Ken – which gives the blond-haired one a significant boost over his enduring rival.

For all the many little changes that *The New Challengers* has received it still retains the same classic gameplay, and while some will no doubt miss the lack of speed that *Turbo* offered – especially 50HZ PAL owners – there's no denying that this latest VC offering is the far better game. In fact our only real problem with *The New Challengers* is that it once again shows the wide gulf between Nintendo's Virtual Console and its Sony and Microsoft peers. Don't get us wrong, it's a perfectly solid conversion of the coin-op original, we just wish that Nintendo would offer us better value for money and give us the original coin-op outing instead.

Still, we should be used to this by now (no matter how unfair it may seem) and the SNES conversion really was something special and offers bold, bright characters that perfectly capture the look of the arcade originals. Granted, the sound is rather ropey in places, but the all-important gameplay remains intact. In fact the only thing missing for that true SNES experience is the original pad.

Yes, it's frustrating that we've all probably bought the original *Street Fighter II* and *Turbo* VC editions already, but it would appear that hardcore fans are going to have to dip into their pockets at least one more time. Well, unless *Street Fighter Alpha II* does come out of course…



» You now have 16 players to choose from. The old favourites are joined by new fighters Cammy, T Hawk, Dee Jay and Fei Long.



» Dee Jay is apparently the most reviled of *Street Fighter* characters. We're not sure where we read this, but it was probably on the internet.

PRESENTATION: 78% The *Street Fighter* games have always featured the bare minimum in terms of presentation and this effort is no different.

AESTHETICS: 88% They're not a patch on the original CPS-2 sprites, but *The New Challengers* does do a very good job of mimicking the coin-op original.

PLAYABILITY: 96% Brilliant, the perfect example of a game that's simple to get to grips with, but offers an incredible amount of depth to determined players.

LONGEVITY: 91% Providing you have the onus to do so, it's going to take forever to master all 16 characters, especially considering all of the tweaks the original cast now have.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 92% Six quid for the SNES's best fighter (after *Alpha II*) is a bit of a no-brainer. This is an essential purchase.

OVERALL: 90%



» It may look pretty dull, but *Theme Hospital* offers plenty of entertainment.



» There is, somewhat surprisingly, a lot of fun to be had curing and researching illnesses.

THEME HOSPITAL

INFORMATION

» **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
» **COST:** £3.49
» **60 HERTZ?:** YES

Well here's a nice little surprise. After discovering Bullfrog's *Populous* on Sony's PlayStation Network, we were expecting *Theme Park* to be next on EA's hit list. Not so though, it has instead decided to release this charming little title, and while it's looking a little rough around the edges, *Theme Hospital* still remains as charming as ever.

Taking the management approach of *Theme Park* and applying it to a hospital was a stroke of genius on Bullfrog's part and it's amazing how well the format still works. Initially starting off with little more than an empty shell, you'll soon start to fill it with medical equipment, staff and, eventually, patients. While *Theme Park* had the thrill of allowing you to see your own tribute to Disney World slowly expand and fill with happy punters, *Theme Hospital* gives you the satisfaction of successfully treating patients, who in turn will pay you cash, which in turn allows you to research new illnesses and so on.

It's a brilliant system that's expertly managed and never gets tiring, mainly because the majority of ailments are just as entertaining to cure – popping a swollen head to reduce it to normal size – as they are to discover.

With its new hi-res overhaul, *Theme Park* now looks better than ever, and while its methodical gameplay isn't going to be for everyone, its fetching price tag means you'd be mad not to at least give it a try.

PRESENTATION: 80% Simple to navigate menus (both in game and out) and Bullfrog's sly sense of humour makes *Theme Hospital* a winner.

AESTHETICS: 82% Despite its new high-resolution sheen, *Theme Hospital* still looks rather basic. Unfortunately, the annoying music hasn't got any better over the years either.

PLAYABILITY: 81% *Theme Hospital* is somewhat difficult to get to grips with, however, it is thoroughly engrossing once you have worked out exactly what you're supposed to be doing.

LONGEVITY: 89% Once you become hooked there's no going back. Wonderfully in-depth stuff.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 96% £3.49 for one of the funniest sim games on the PSone? Sign us up, please.

OVERALL: 85%

TRON

INFORMATION

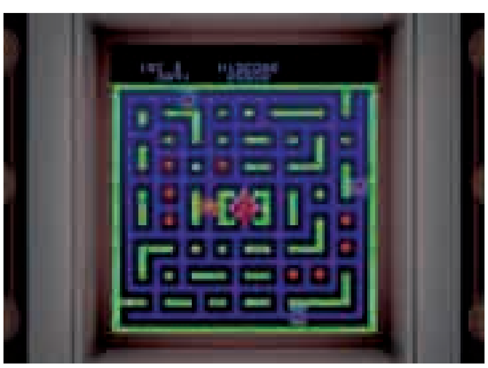
» **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **COST:** 400 POINTS
» **60 HERTZ?:** YES

One of the downsides of reviewing Xbox Live Arcade games is that you normally have to sift through a lot of average titles before you get to the truly great stuff. Although this month we've had the pleasure of enjoying the dynamic *Omega Five*, we've also had to put up with this sorry effort that was churned out to celebrate *Tron*'s 25th anniversary (last year, if you've forgotten).

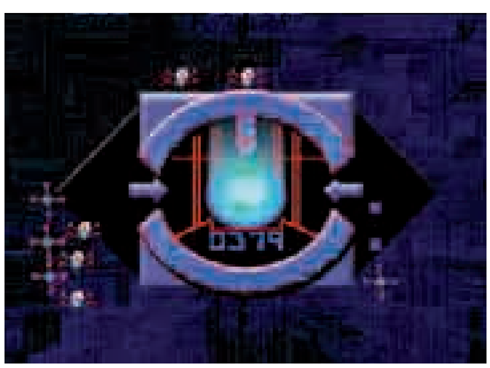
Tron the videogame may well accurately replicate some of the key scenes from the popular film, but it makes for one humdrum videogame experience. Dialled in by Backbone Entertainment, this is an awfully dull port of a title that wasn't that impressive when it was released in 1982, and despite offering a variety of different gameplay modes, it only really comes alive when you play the Light Cycle section.

The new enhanced mode offers little over the original graphics; the controls are clunky as hell, while the dire sound effects will have you covering your ears in horror. Yes, the price is pretty good (400 points equates to around £3) but there are far better games available for the same price point. Indeed, if you're really desperate for a bit of *Tron* love, why not download the superior *Discs Of Tron*, which is also now available and is a far better use of the licence.

Xbox Live Arcade has been on fire recently with quality titles such as *Metal Slug 3*, *Rez HD*, *Puzzle Quest* and *Omega Five*, so it's somewhat disappointing that this sorry effort has been able to slip through Microsoft's quality control.



» *Tron* is ugly and it's not even a good game. It only costs £3, but it's not worth it.



» *Discs Of Tron* is far better than this. Expect a review in the next issue.

PRESENTATION: 45% *Tron*'s menus and its presentation are as archaic as its 26-year-old visuals.

AESTHETICS: 45% *Tron*'s visuals really haven't aged at all well either. The new enhanced mode doesn't look that much better unfortunately.

PLAYABILITY: 52% There are four different gameplay modes to take part in, but they're let down by clunky controls and dodgy collision detection.

LONGEVITY: 35% Why would you want to play this when there are far better games available on Microsoft's download service?

VALUE FOR MONEY: 40% Okay, so this is far cheaper than the original arcade board, but you wouldn't want to own that either.

OVERALL: 42%





» There's a nice range of characters to choose from in 1080° Snowboarding and they all control very differently to each other. Best choose your favourite.

1080: TENEIGHTY SNOWBOARDING

INFORMATION

- » **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
- » **COST:** 1,000 POINTS
- » **60 HERTZ?:** YES

Say what you like about Nintendo's support of 60 Hertz, but it certainly knows how to keep Nintendo 64 fans happy. *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time, F-Zero X, Lylat Wars* and *Super Mario 64* are just a few of the fantastic games already available, and it would appear that the hits are still coming.

With its fantastic level design, well-balanced characters and beautifully crisp visuals, *1080 Snowboarding* has always been our favourite snowboarding title and this recent release from Nintendo just confirms what a great game it still is.

While it takes a while to get used to the in-depth control system (which isn't helped by the new Classic Controller) you'll soon be pulling off spectacular stunts on the slopes and tearing through the Championship mode. Sadly, this is where *1080* begins to falter, for while it's a great title, it's all over a little too quickly. Granted, you have a trick mode and time attack to participate in, but they both get tiring pretty quickly, so the majority of your time will be spent on the excellent multiplayer mode.

Despite its lack of longevity, we still recommend you download *1080* if only so you can see a Nintendo game that moves away from the beaten track and doesn't have to depend on Mario in order to sell it.



» The price is pretty 'steep' (geddit?), but *1080 Snowboarding* is an enjoyable Nintendo 64 game, that you really should purchase



» Although it looks old in places, the game's graphics really are pretty good, as you can see from this gorgeous landscape above.

PRESENTATION: 80% Extremely slick presentation throughout the game.

AESTHETICS: 85% It's definitely showing its age now, but *1080* is still a really good-looking game.

PLAYABILITY: 81% The controls certainly take quite a while to get used to, and they aren't helped by the Classic Controller.

LONGEVITY: 72% The championship mode is fairly challenging, but once it's been completed there's very little to pull you back.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 75% 1,000 points is pretty expensive, but *1080* is still worth downloading.

OVERALL: 82%



» We'd much rather play the original *Flashback*.

FADE TO BLACK

INFORMATION

» **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
» **COST:** £3.49
» **60 HERTZ?:** YES

It's a well-known fact that 3D games age far faster than their 2D counterparts. If you need further proof simply download this ancient-looking effort and see for yourself.

Fade To Black may have been a fairly impressive looking title upon its release in 1995, but it's certainly looking a little long in the tooth now. The high-resolution overhaul – something that all downloadable PSone games now benefit from – certainly helps, but the bland



» Conrad and Johnny Five prepared to take on the alien menace.



» They impressed once, but the visuals are now showing their age.

looking environments, general lack of detail and poor animation don't do *Fade To Black* any favours at all, and as you jerk your way from one bland location to the next, you'll be wishing you were playing Conrad's original adventure instead.

Visuals aren't the only concern of *Fade To Black* though, as the gameplay – inconsistent even back in the day – hasn't aged particularly gracefully either. While it was fairly innovative back in the day, the mishmash of playing styles, *Metal Gear Solid*-like gameplay mechanics, dull plot and its annoying camera are all particularly frustrating these days.

We're certainly pleased to see the PlayStation's PSone support finally picking up, but we have to wonder about some of the titles that Sony is currently choosing to represent its original console.

Fade To Black has aged badly unfortunately, but it still remains an interesting release, and should be at least experienced by fans of the original 2D classic. Just don't expect too much and you should be fine.

PRESENTATION: 70% Menus are easy to navigate and the in-game interface is pretty solid, but *Fade To Black* is now showing its age.

AESTHETICS: 70% The music is as atmospheric as ever, but the graphics really don't look great these days.

PLAYABILITY: 72% Fans of *Metal Gear Solid* will enjoy the extremely similar gameplay, but the cumbersome controls and irksome camera greatly annoy.

LONGEVITY: 71% It's going to take a fair while to complete, but the camera and tricky controls may stop you from reaching the end.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 70% The £3.49 price point is excellent, but there's still no denying you'd probably overlook this if it was in your local gaming emporium's bargain bin.

OVERALL: 70%

RAMPART

INFORMATION

» **DOWNLOAD IT FROM:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
» **COST:** £2.49
» **60 HERTZ?:** YES

***Rampart* has been out for quite a while now, but there have been so few decent releases for Sony's download service that we thought we'd review it anyway.**

For those who haven't played it, *Rampart* is a puzzle game set over three distinct stages that has you trying to save your castle while destroying all opponents. The first stage sees you placing a set amount of cannons within your castle, the second lets you fire upon your opponents, while the third has you rebuilding your walls and hopefully expanding on your fortress so you can add more cannons and obliterate your enemies.

It's an incredibly simple premise that works exceedingly well thanks to the aforementioned pacing and the fact that you're playing against two other players, who are both desperate to take you down with some well-placed cannonballs. This conversion by Digital Eclipse is pretty solid, and while it lacks the arcade original's trackball, control is still pretty tight. You're never going to match the speeds you could manage when playing the coin-op version and some may find rebuilding your broken castle needlessly tricky, but when you go online everyone is on the same level playing field.



» *Rampart* is a truly excellent game, but it would have been so much better if the PlayStation 3 came equipped with an actual trackball.

A fast and furious game, *Rampart* is an excellent blend of strategy and puzzling that is well worth the rather paltry £2.49 asking price. It also makes us wonder why we're paying a pound more for what is virtually exactly the same experience (sans Achievements) on Xbox Live Arcade.



» If you love strategy and puzzle games, you'll find that *Rampart* is right up your proverbial alley. If you want an online game our GamerTag is Strideristhebest.

PRESENTATION: 65% It is rather basic throughout, we're afraid.

AESTHETICS: 70% Very simple looking nowadays. Could have arguably done with a new enhanced look.

PLAYABILITY: 88% Castle rebuilding is a little fiddly, but this is otherwise easy-to-pick-up fun.

LONGEVITY: 80% You're going to get pretty bored of the original *Rampart* pretty quickly. However, online opponents means you'll constantly be playing the excellent multiplayer.

VALUE FOR MONEY: 85% Less than three pounds for a brilliant multiplayer experience? That sounds pretty good to us.

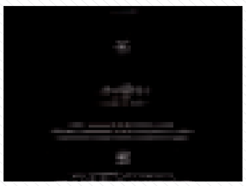
OVERALL: 80%

HOMEBREW RATED

MORE ARCADE-STYLED FUN AS STUART GETS TO GRIPS WITH SHOOOT 2 AND THE BRILLIANTLY NAMED SPACE BARNACLE

SHOOOT 2

A GAME THAT ANSWERS THE QUESTION: SQUARE VS CIRCLE, WHO WOULD WIN?

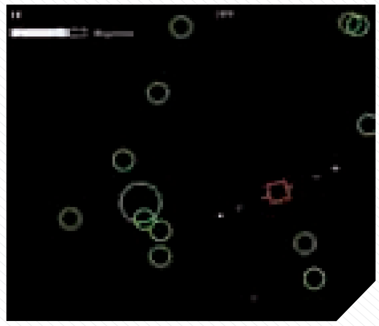


FORMAT: PC
DEVELOPED BY: TONYPA
LINK: WWW.GIMME5GAMES.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

If you imagined supplanting jagged rocks with smooth circles; and a triangular ship with a continually rotating square that fires its cannon automatically – you'd be forgiven for thinking that *ShoOot 2* is nothing more than a homebrew take on *Asteroids*.

For some, this won't feel like any kind of improvement on that classic game. Not being able to control when and where your ship fires can feel preventive, but it's actually this hand-tying formula – as you steer your revolving square closer to the circles to ensure a kill – that creates the cunning element of risk and reward in the game.

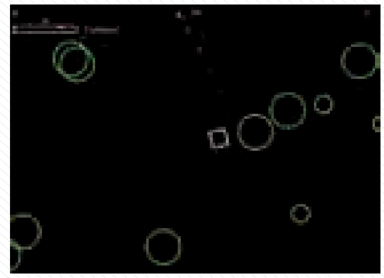
The game really starts to come into its own after the first few waves of circles are destroyed. Sapping your targets, and the smaller circular space debris they break into, will award you with special power-ups.



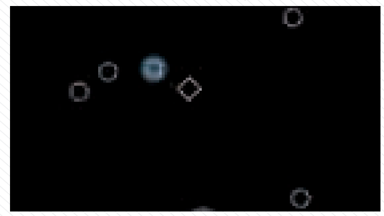
» It looks simple, but it's hellishly great fun to play.

These vary from spray fire, to 'caffeine' (which increases your ships rate of fire) and 'naptime' (which slows the circles down and makes them easier to zap). Once you start chaining the power-ups though, the game soon starts throwing up plenty more circles, shifting the game to feel more about timing evasive attacks rather than mindless blasting.

The controls work well, too. Using the mouse, you drag your ship around the screen and with the Z and X keys you can change the speed of rotation. And as a nice little bonus there's a neat online leaderboard to post your high-scores on so you can see how good a circle killer you really are.



» It's the *Deliverance* version of *Geometry Wars*.



» Graphic whores may want to look elsewhere.

PRESENTATION: 30% Think '*Rudimentary Wars*', and you're nearly there.

AESTHETICS: 50% Seems to suit the game, but its nothing out of this world.

PLAYABILITY: 80% Might take a bit of effort to get into, but it's well worth it.

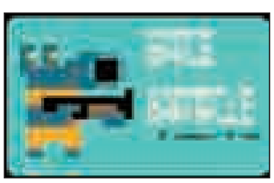
LONGEVITY: 80% An online leaderboard will ensure you keep coming back for more.

VALUE FOR MONEY: NA

OVERALL: 75%

SPACE BARNACLE

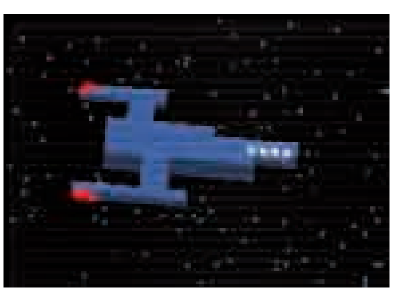
SHENMUE MEETS THE MOOMINS



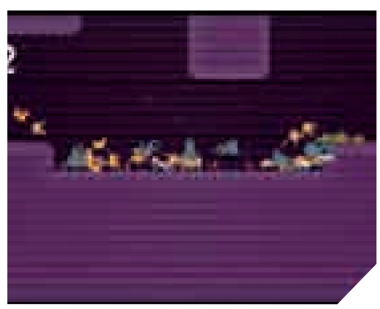
FORMAT: PC
DEVELOPED BY: TEAM DOOMLASER
LINK: WWW.GREATGAMESEXPERIMENT.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

A wonderfully enjoyable game by the incredibly talented Team Doomlaser, *Space Barnacle* tells the story of a long-nosed alien – that looks like a cross between a Moomin and a vacuum cleaner – whose spaceship is mysteriously shot down and crash lands on an asteroid.

Tragically, his father is seriously hurt in the smash and, using his last dying muscle spasm, he hands his son a laser gun and



» So that's what happened to the spaceship from *Button Moon*… It ended up in *Space Barnacle*.



» Ever controlled something that looks like a cross between a Moomin and a hoover? Now's your chance.

asks him to avenge his death. Lost and fatherless, your character must now find a way to escape the giant space rock and dish out vengeance on somebody (on whom, we're not entirely sure, but we're sure that these JJ Abrams-sized plot holes will be answered at some point).

The gameplay in *Space Barnacle* is brilliantly simple and revolves around locating and destroying generators to unlock airlocks. The generators will generally be smattered all over the place and can sometimes be really difficult to find. Making life that little bit harder are a wide variety of interesting-looking enemies that will poke at your energy bar. You get floating jellyfish, robotic fat-headed birds that spit fire, insatiable giant caterpillars and pink slugs with bug eyes. Graphically though, *Space Barnacle* has a really neat NES vibe, and given that movement consists of using the arrow keys and two action buttons – one to attack; the other to jump – the controls also steer towards that thinking.

There are also useful power-ups around that can be acquired to help you scale the hazardous terrain – which, incidentally, promises more booby traps than a trip to Spearmint Rhino on payday. Spikes will fire up from the floor, stalactites will smash to the ground and laser beams will try to make space dust out of our imperious little hero. There's also a neat glitch (at least we think it's a glitch) whereby pressing the D on your keyboard will cause your character to repeatedly explode, allowing you to control his invisible ghost and fire his gun – which is brilliantly weird!

PRESENTATION: 70% Graphically, there's really nothing staggeringly technical on show here, but they do their job.

AESTHETICS: 80% It has a neat NES vibe.

PLAYABILITY: 85% Smooth animation and tight controls. A genuinely enjoyable way to pass a few hours.

LONGEVITY: 80% Actually, we didn't finish it so we're guessing here.

VALUE FOR MONEY: NA

OVERALL: 78%

WANT TO ROCK OUT BUT CAN'T AFFORD GUITAR HERO III? THEN CHECK OUT THIS FAR CHEAPER ALTERNATIVE BY SOPHIE HOULDEN

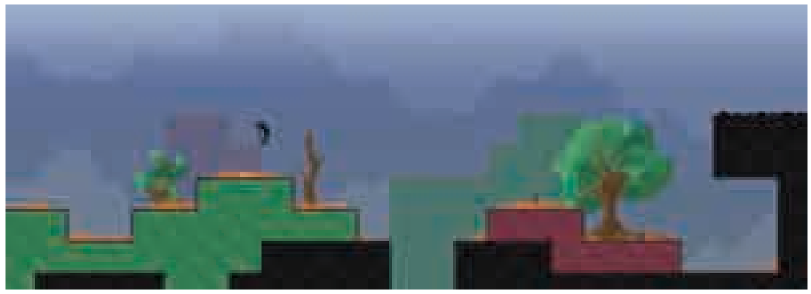
KNYTT STORIES

FINALLY, A KNYTT THAT WE'D HAPPILY LET LAY ITS EGGS IN OUR HAIR

Talented pixel artist Nifflas follows up his wonderful *Knytt*, with an equally brilliant sequel that builds on the fun offered in the first game. *Knytt Stories*, for those who haven't played the original, is a quirky platform/ puzzle-game marriage. Newcomers are advised to spend some time with the tutorial, which takes you through the ins and outs of the game.

Essentially, your character will collect and use numerous power-ups that affect how he interacts with his environment. For instance, when he's fully powered he will be able to jump further, scale walls, double jump, create a holographic ruse of himself and glow warning-red whenever an enemy is nearby. The structure of *Knytt Stories* finds you traversing seamlessly organic areas that segue brilliantly into one, so one second you might be in an underground cave and the next you might be venturing through dark, gloomy woods.

All the powers that you acquire can be accessed using just two key buttons, and this really sums up the maxim of *Knytt Stories*: effortless. Seamlessly jumping to and from what would normally be precarious platforms, without fear of falling to a lengthy death – because your character has an arsenal of recovery moves hiding inside his long shaggy mullet – is very refreshing. Admittedly, the main game is quite a short experience, but there's a great level editor that gives plenty more life to the game, and a growing online community that has already created a whole load of new downloadable *Knytt* 'stories' to play through.



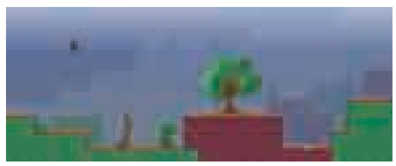
» *Knytt Stories* is sort of like playing a bizarre version of *Roland In The Caves*, but now it's actually rather good instead of rather naff.

FORMAT: PC
DEVELOPED BY: NIFFLAS
LINK: WWW.GREATGAMESEXPERIMENT.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT





» The main character may be incredibly tiny, but he exudes a remarkable amount of charm.



» Yes the main game is rather short, but at least the level editor ensures you'll always be able to create a new challenge.

PRESENTATION: 70% If you're a fan of pixel art then you'll love this.
AESTHETICS: 80% It has a neat Amiga flavour.
PLAYABILITY: 80% Extremely playable, you will have a lot of fun with *Knytt Stories*.
LONGEVITY: 60% The level editor gives this life. The main game though is a bit short.
VALUE FOR MONEY: NA

OVERALL: 75%

MEGASUPER: EXTREME

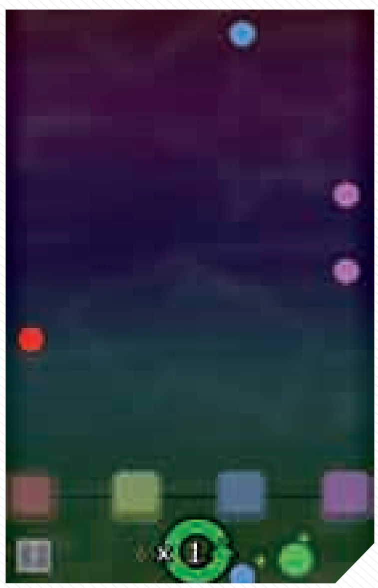
GUITAR HERO GOES HOMEBREW



FORMAT: PC
DEVELOPED BY: SOPHIE HOULDEN
LINK: WWW.NEWGROUNDS.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: STUART HUNT

This rhythm-action game takes a riff from a certain successful, stringed-instrument game franchise. And while it's a nice idea in principle – whiling away a few minutes tapping the same four keys repeatedly on a keyboard like a timid secretary – sadly the presentation of *MegaSuper: Extreme*, considering it's a game that consists of watching four differing coloured circles cascading down something that resembles a fretboard, is what drastically lets this homebrew effort down, big time.

Let's get with the good stuff first. Okay, there are eight tracks to play through, and to give the game credit where it's due, they're actually very nice little tracks – which make downloading this quirky homebrew game worth the effort alone. The problem we have here though is that rather than give you control of a single instrument – offering you the feeling that you're actually contributing to a section of a music track – *MegaSuper: Extreme* gives you control of a whole bloody song, with any bum notes you play simply turning the volume down so it feels like you have sea water in your ears. The controls are also a shade doughy, with the occasional missed note (which deep down you knew you hit) simply playing by its own set of rules and musical scales. Overall, it's a very nice idea, which has, unfortunately, been poorly implemented.



» It's a nice idea, but rather poorly executed. Pity.



» Sadly, *Sam's Town* by The Killers isn't included.

PRESENTATION: 40% Considering we're not trying to trace the Mona Lisa… very poor.
AESTHETICS: 50% Has a mobile-phone game, spinach sandwich taste to it.
PLAYABILITY: 50% Nothing to it really.
LONGEVITY: 40% You might return to it just to hear the music tracks again.
VALUE FOR MONEY: NA

OVERALL: 45%

HOMEBREW RATED

IN AN EXCLUSIVE NEW INTERVIEW, RETRO GAMER SPEAKS TO THE CREATORS OF BRAND NEW MEGA DRIVE RPG PIER SOLAR

WE SHINE A LITTLE LIGHT OVER PIER SOLAR

MEET THE TEAM



Hoston is a young botanist whom the story of *Pier Solar* is set around. It's his father's sudden illness that sparks the friends to venture into the forbidden caverns of Raja to seek out a cure.



Alina is the female of the troupe. She's childhood friends with both Hoston and Edessot and her relationship is a protective one. She's perhaps the most level-headed member of the group, and she's none to shabby with a crossbow either.



Affluent mechanic **Edessot** is a bit of a loner at heart, quite happy to meander around life with only himself for company. However, his friendship with Hoston and particularly Alina is having him question whether there's space in his heart for others.

If you read the news section of last month's issue of Retro Gamer you might remember we touched on an upcoming RPG project that's soon to get a physical release on the Mega Drive and Mega CD.

Pier Solar is an epic adventure that has combined the talents and handiwork of Sega's popular homebrew community: Eidolon's Inn.

The story focuses on the fertile and peaceful town of Reja and three close friends: Hoston, Alina and Edessot. After Hoston's father falls tragically ill one day, the friends venture out to seek a rare magical herb that is said to hold a cure. In the shadows, however, an evil force, lying dormant for aeons, has been biding its time, growing in power, and during their mission this evil awakens.

We were made privy to the game last month, and we decided we'd contact the team involved and invite them to shed some light on the project for us. We spoke with Tulio, who's the lead programmer of the game, and Daniel, the graphic designer. And this is what they had to say:

Retro Gamer: How did the *Pier Solar* project begin?

Tulio: It began in 2004 as a co-operative project between the members of Eidolon's Inn (www.eidolons-inn.net). The plot was supposed to be a story involving the members of the Message Board (called The Tavern, from where the codename Tavern RPG came) and having emulator authors as the main characters.

The project progressed with two active members for more than one year, then we started getting graphic designers involved and that's when the game really started to take shape. After a conversation between me and another member, we decided to drop the original plot and write a completely new story, one that would be more elaborate and appeal to a wider audience. The plot developed very well and then a new name was defined, and then finally we decided that it would be worth releasing it in a physical media.



» The game is shaping up nicely. We're hoping to get our hands on a copy so we can put it through its paces.

"IT WAS DEVELOPED TO NOT ONLY BE A WELL-FLOWING STORY, BUT ALSO TO EXPLORE THE CHARACTERS AS EMOTIONAL BEINGS"



RG: How large is the team working on the project?

Tulio: We have right now: three programmers, four graphic designers, three mappers, one music composer, one story writer and two game dialogue writers. Some members share more than one activity. In total there are 11 people involved.

RG: Can you tell us a little bit more about the game itself?

Daniel: *Pier Solar* is a traditional 16-bit RPG very much in the Japanese style. We all loved classic RPGs like the *Final Fantasy* series, *Chrono Trigger* and the *Lunar* games. We're trying to re-create the feeling that those timeless masterpieces emitted using a cute graphic-style and turn-based battles in combination with an exciting, unique story and likeable characters.

Tulio: A lot of effort has been put into all areas of the game. We are RPG fans and retro gamers ourselves, so we try to combine the best of each experience into this game. The graphics are being carefully worked to explore the best visuals that the Mega Drive can offer. I have done tests on hardware quite frequently and honestly, on a 21-inch CRT, it definitely looks as good as late SNES games. The music in the game has been fully composed by one of our members. We are lucky to have such a wonderful composer in our team who



» The visuals are said to be pushing the Mega Drive to the limits. From what we've seen so far, we'd agree.



» If Pier Solar's gameplay is able to match it's glorious visuals then we should be in for a real treat. Time to cross those fingers .

has the ability to capture the feeling of an environment in a song, creating a special atmosphere for each place and situation of the story. We were also lucky with the FM driver that we adopted, since it was developed by one audiophile programmer who happened to love the Mega Drive audio system. He's created, what I believe, is one of the (if not the) most powerful FM drivers I've ever seen. The story is a very interesting part of the game, too. It was developed to not only be a well-flowing story, but also to explore the characters as emotional beings with their own objectives and feelings. Our goal is to keep a complex and intriguing plot that will get the player stuck to the couch!

RG: How long has it taken to complete?
Tulio: Some stages were completed almost a year ago, but most of the stages are in the polishing or development phase at the moment. We estimate to have the game complete and tested at least three months before the release.

RG: Why have you decided to release *Pier Solar* on both the Mega Drive and the Mega CD?
Daniel: What we all have in common is the love for the Mega Drive; it is a system we all have very fond memories of. For me, taking part in the production of a game for the machine is a dream. Although I love the Mega Drive, I always found the Mega Drive's selection of RPGs to be inferior to the SNES games of the time – with a few exceptions such as *Phantasy Star IV* and *Lunar* – especially since visually most RPGs for Sega's 16-bit powerhouse were disappointing. So now we can prove that the Mega Drive was more than capable of pulling off a highly detailed RPG with the looks of late SNES titles, and today, we can achieve great things with the PCs we have standing at home. We are confident that we can reach a very high standard and show effects never seen before in a 16-bit RPG.

RG: What are the differences between the ports?
Tulio: The storyline is the same. As one would imagine, Mega CD/Sega CD will have the obvious advantage of better audio, since it has advanced digital audio capabilities.



But, contrary to popular belief, the Mega Drive/Genesis version will be the one more benefiting with graphical capabilities. Our engine has been developed 100 per cent from scratch and with no support of any kind – except from the documents you can find on the internet. Some areas in Mega CD/Sega CD development are very obscure and the memory limitation imposes a big challenge on keeping both versions with the same features.



» If you want all the latest information and this fascinating new release then head on over to www.piersolar.co.uk.

RG: When will it be released?
Daniel: Well, we are aiming at a release to celebrate the Mega Drive´s 20th birthday; that would be 29 October 2008. That would be a very special date, and so we hope we can keep it.

RG: How can people purchase the game?
Daniel: We will sell the game through our website, and probably a few internet shops for people who would prefer to order from a shop within their country.

"WE'RE CONFIDENT THAT WE CAN REACH A VERY HIGH STANDARD AND SHOW EFFECTS NEVER SEEN BEFORE IN A 16-BIT RPG"

RG: How many copies of the game are being released and how much is it likely to cost?
Daniel: We are talking with various potential publishers at the moment, and we might even have to produce and distribute the game all by ourselves. But before that, we cannot give you an exact price. What we can say though is that we do not aim to make a big profit. There will also be different versions of the game available, some of them with extra goodies.

BARGAIN HUNT

HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

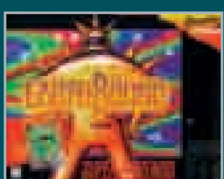
Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. This month we take a look at SNES RPGs

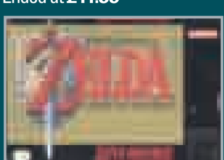
EARTHBOUND

Normally sells for **£55+**
Ended at **£76.35**



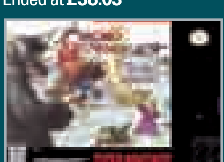
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£11.35**



CHRONO TRIGGER

Normally sells for **£50**
Ended at **£38.03**



3DO



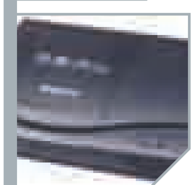
3DO GOLDSTAR

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)

» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



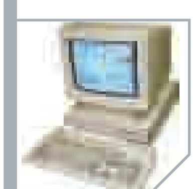
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released.

- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

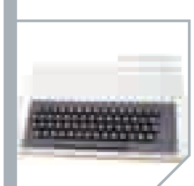
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**

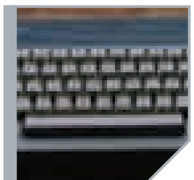
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM

» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.

- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor.



CPC 664

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($165+)**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.

- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.

- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II

» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**

Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.

- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI

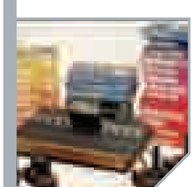


400/800/600XL/XE

» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.

- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)

» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.

- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

ROCKING HORSE SHIT
HEN'S TEETH
LUCKY FIND
EBAY REGULAR
CAR-BOOT SALE BARGAIN

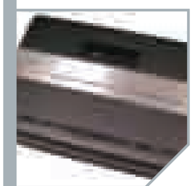


5200

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**

Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.

- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800

» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.

- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES

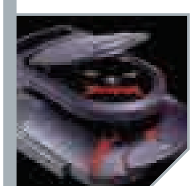


JAGUAR

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!

- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**

Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!

- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD



LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.

- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



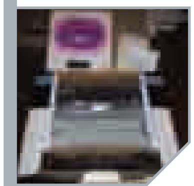
ST

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**

This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.

- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER

» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**

Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA

» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**

Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.

- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN (ATMARK)

» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**

A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.

- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



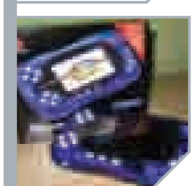
WONDERSWAN (B/W)

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR

» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL

» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**

Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.

- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA 500/600/1200

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**

Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.

- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4

» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**

The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.

- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64

» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

One of the bestselling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.

- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**

Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.

- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128

» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**

Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.



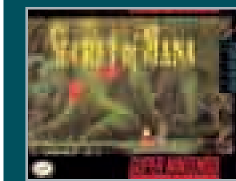
CDTV

» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

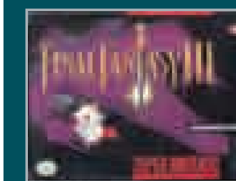
SECRET OF MANA

Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£56.35**



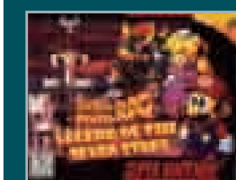
FINAL FANTASY III

Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£48.56**



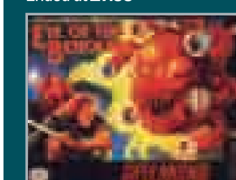
SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

Normally sells for **£35**
Ended at **£27.89**



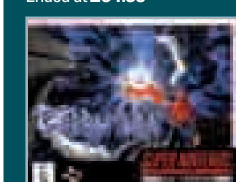
ADVANCED D&D: EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£7.99**



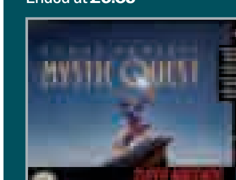
TERRANIGMA

Normally sells for **£55**
Ended at **£64.39**

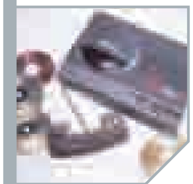


MYSTIC QUEST LEGEND

Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£6.89**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



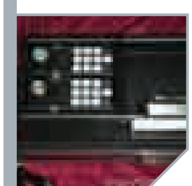
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- TRIGGERHEART EXCELISA
- BORDER DOWN
- IKARUGA



CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More insanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio had hoped it would do better than its PV-1000 console released in 1983.



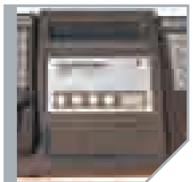
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson that had numerous different clones released, as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act. Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



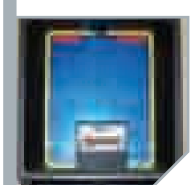
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



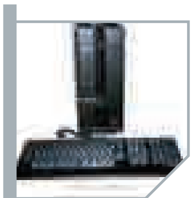
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

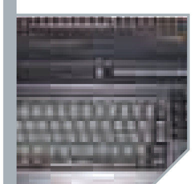
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

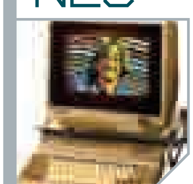


MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

NEC



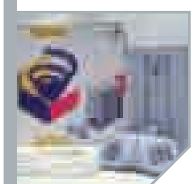
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN



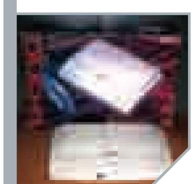
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PC-E and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PC-E DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PC-E/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

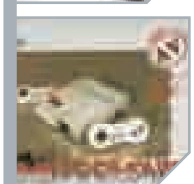


DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PC-E Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!



FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.

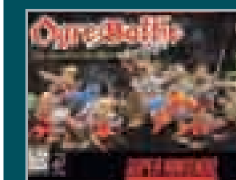


FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

BREATH OF FIRE
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£21.45**



OGRE BATTLE: THE MARCH OF THE BLACK QUEEN
Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£28.46**



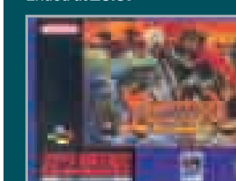
ACTRAISER
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£9.37**



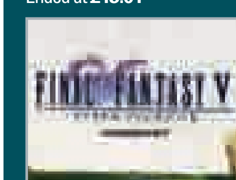
BAHAMUT LAGOON
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£6.67**

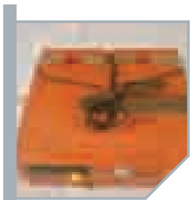


EQUINOX
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£5.87**



FINAL FANTASY V
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£13.01**

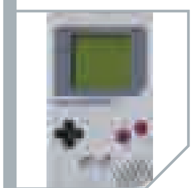




SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



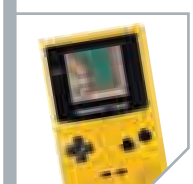
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



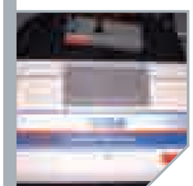
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



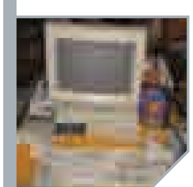
SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history. The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



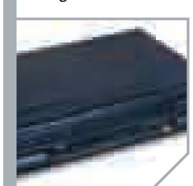
SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad

hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

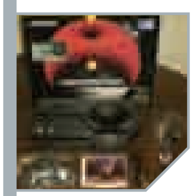


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.

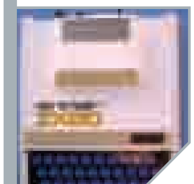
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.

- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR

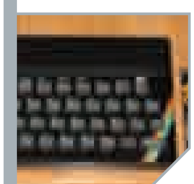


ZX80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



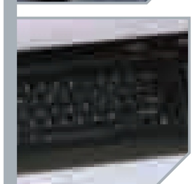
ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



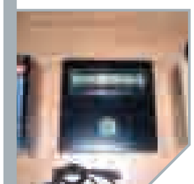
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR

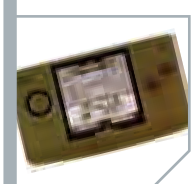


NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



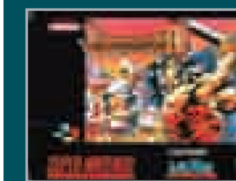
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

SECRET OF EVERMORE
Normally sells for **£50**
Ended at **£43.49**



BREATH OF FIRE II
Normally sells for **£14**
Ended at **£17.25**



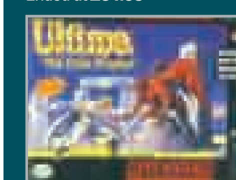
UNCHARTERED WATERS
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£24.72**



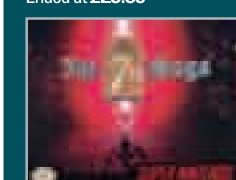
DRAKKHEN
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£3.67**



ULTIMA: FALSE PROPHET
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£31.59**



THE 7TH SAGA
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£23.89**



RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO ALBERT YARUSSO ABOUT HIS EXCELLENT ATARI TRIBUTE SITE, ATARI AGE

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site that's dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site that covers every single machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
A fantastic arcade forum that caters for an Australian audience.

CPC ZONE
www.cpczone.net
Excellent site for the Amstrad range of computers with all the latest news and reviews.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews and a friendly forum.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
Brilliant Amiga website run by Kim Lemon, the owner of the excellent Lemon 64.

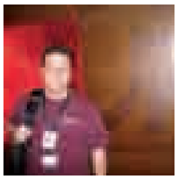
MAC RETRO
www.macretro.tk
Brilliant site that's dedicated to getting emulators up and running on the Mac.

NEO-GEO.COM
www.neo-geo.com
Dedicated to SNK's AES and MVS systems, but there's still lots of different coverage to enjoy.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
Not just Sega focused but dedicated to covering as many arcade games as possible.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org/
Largely devoted to import games, but there is a retro section that offers useful advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you thought the Atari 2600 was ancient, you may want to visit this fascinating site.



Retro Gamer: When did you first set AtariAge up?
Albert Yarusso: AtariAge went live in April 2001 after several months of hard work by Alex Bilstein and myself. AtariAge was the successor to the popular 'Atari 2600 Nexus' website that Alex started several years before that. The 2600 Nexus focused solely on the Atari 2600. We wanted to create a site that had broader coverage of Atari systems and launched AtariAge with sections for the 2600, 5200 and 7800. We later added the Lynx and Jaguar and hope to add sections for Atari 8-bit and ST computers down the road.

RG: Why did you choose to focus on the Atari?
AY: The Atari 2600 was my first videogame console as I was growing up, and that's true for millions of people back in the late Seventies and early Eighties. I only had a small selection of games back then, so in the late Nineties I became interested again in the 2600 and wanted to play the entire library of games. A co-worker at Looking Glass Technologies who programmed 2600 games "back in the day" spurred this renewed interest on. When I started collecting for the 2600 I had no idea just how many games had been created for the system!

RG: What gives AtariAge the edge do you think?
AY: The AtariAge forums have been around as long as the site has, and even longer if you include the simpler message board that was part of the Atari 2600 Nexus site. With that comes a wealth of classic gaming knowledge from users who have been around since AtariAge's inception. The forums have a very active user base with many thriving topics where questions get answered quickly by experienced members.

RG: What's the most popular part of the website?
AY: The entire site gets a fair bit of traffic, but the section that people come back to time and time again would have to be the forums. As of this writing, nearly 1.5 million posts have been made by members.

RG: How can our readers contribute to the site?
AY: Contributions are always welcome, especially in the way of images that we are missing. Plus, once the 8-bit and ST sections are off the ground, user contributions will be absolutely essential in making them compelling. Some of the changes I plan on making later this year will allow users to more easily contribute to the site. I'm a huge Atari 8-bit computer fan, so adding an 8-bit section to AtariAge is something I've wanted to do for quite some time.

> "THE FORUMS HAVE A VERY ACTIVE USER BASE WHERE QUESTIONS GET ANSWERED QUICKLY BY EXPERIENCED MEMBERS"

RG: Have you ever considered running a similar site for another series of computers?
AY: Yes, I've thought about creating other sites several times over the years. However, there are some significant improvements I'd like to make to AtariAge before I'd seriously consider tackling other classic gaming sites. Anything is possible in the future.

RG: Can you remember your very first memory of the Atari?
AY: Seeing a friend play *Star Raiders* on his Atari 800 computer was amazing for me. It seemed a bit complex to me at the time (I was probably eight or nine years old), but it made a lasting impression and helped fuel my desire to own a computer of my own. An Atari 800XL would later be my first personal computer, and you can bet that I spent a fair amount of time finally playing *Star Raiders*!

DEEPER LOOK – WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

Atari Age
www.atariage.com



Now seven years old, AtariAge is a truly exceptional site that offers everything a prospective Atari collector needs. There's rarity guides and lists of every game released for Atari's five main consoles. A handy shop keeps you up to date with all the latest homebrew games that are available, while the front page is always updated with the latest Atari news. While the main site doesn't heavily focus on Atari computers, there are dedicated sections in the excellent forum that cater to both the 8-bit and 16-bit computers.

The forum is a wealth of information and there are plenty of friendly forumites to help you out if you need a little Atari guidance. A truly excellent website.

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com/
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but it's a lot of fun and boasts a bubbly forum.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega – there's tons of Sega music to listen to.

RETRO101
www.retro101.co.uk
It's only just sprung up, but Retro101 is proving popular with some informative articles.

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that looks at the US game's market courtesy of Shane Monroe.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
All the latest games and a retro section with helpful members.

THE RUBBER BEERMAT
http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/themanor33/TRBv2/
Excellent Spectrum site that champions a lot of rare games.

SHOOT THE CORE
www.shootthecore.moonpod.com
Excellent site that loves shmups of all descriptions.

SHMUPS
www.shmups.com
Absolutely brilliant website that's dedicated to the best gaming genre of all time.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
Screenshots, game endings, cover scans and reviews.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Your definitive stop for all that is Virtual Console related.

WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk

eMag

50 ISSUES YOUNG!

IN ORDER TO CELEBRATE OUR FIRST MILESTONE, WE'VE COMPILED ONE OF THE BEST ISSUES EVER THAT NO SELF-RESPECTING RETRO FAN SHOULD BE WITHOUT…

THE MAKING OF…
GUNSTAR HEROES

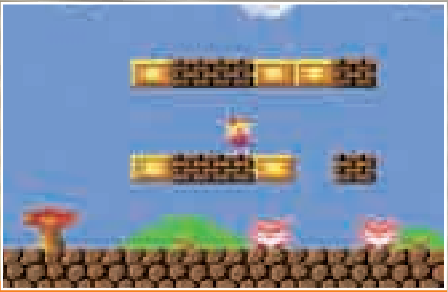
It's one of the greatest 16-bit shooters of all time and set Treasure on the path to videogame superstardom, but how did it become such a successful blaster? **Retro Gamer** has all the answers…





THE HISTORY OF…
GRAND THEFT AUTO

As Rockstar prepares to unleash *GTA IV* on a salivating public, we go back to the franchise's roots and talk to the game's original developers. Prepare for some exciting revelations about the classic series.



THE MAKING OF…
THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS

It was the Commodore 64 and Amiga's answer to *Super Mario Bros*, but then Rainbow Arts caught the attention of Nintendo and the game was pulled from shelves quicker than you can say lawsuit. Manfred Trenz reveals the sad fate behind the legendary platformer.

NEXT MONTH

NEXT ISSUE

retro GAMER THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

LOAD 50

ON SALE 24 APR 2008

RETROINSPECTION…



DREAMCAST
Despite being one of the greatest consoles of all time, Sega's Dreamcast failed to recapture the glory years of the Mega Drive and became its last-ever console. Discover how the dream machine turned into a living nightmare.

THE MAKING OF…

RETRO GAMER
We're allowed a little self-indulgency this issue, so join Martyn Carroll as he recounts the highs and lows of delivering **Retro Gamer** to the masses.





THE BIG FEATURE

THE 50 GAMES THAT CHANGED OUR LIVES
We're all fans of *Jet Set Willy*, *Pong* and *Tetris*, but what do the actual developers think about these landmark titles? Find out next month as 50 people within the industry reveal the games that changed their lives forever.

AND THE REST…

Back to the Eighties
Retro Revivals
Desert Island Disks
Classic Games
Back to the Nineties
And much, much more

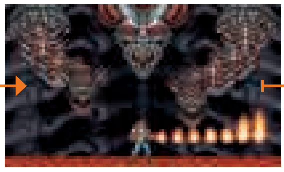


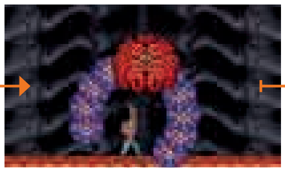
CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

For their 16-bit debut, Bill and Lance had a real fight on their hands. And for those players skilful enough to help finish the fight on the hardest setting, a special ending was the reward. For those not skilful enough to take up the challenge don't worry, because here it is











SCREEN 1
Here we are, the final stand – a boss-rush section to really test your run-'n'-gun mettle. Bill has stumbled on the heart of the problem: a cardiac muscle protected by an army of beasties. Let's give it a coronary, shall we?

SCREEN 2
This is getting freaky. The next abomination you face is a demonically possessed human-cum-frog-type crab alien… Geez. Remember, this is *Contra*, so put this terror to the back of your mind and pump that sucka full of laser.

SCREEN 3
This day keeps getting better. Before Bill can patch himself up, a demon wearing glove puppets tries to rip him apart. Bill recalls a documentary he saw about demons with glove puppets being afraid of fire, so flame on!

SCREEN 4
You might've burnt the alien boss to a cinder, but his brain grows some arms and vows revenge on Bill. Don't let the sorrowful look in its eye fool you, as this cranium would happily teach you a thing or two about pain and the afterlife.

SCREEN 5
With the mission over, a daring escape, via chopper, is your reward. Rather than give you a comfy seat, the pilot forces you to hang all the way home. Jerk. Still, at least 50 people and a dog threw you a party. Okay, who's buying?